DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 339 249 FL 800 401

AUTHOR	Shohet, Linda
TITLE	Literacy Across the Curriculum: Language for Learning. Volume 6, Nos. 1-5, 1990.
INSTITUTION	Dawson Coll., Montreal (Quebec). Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community.; Quebec Association for Adult Learning.
PUB DATE	90
NOTE	67p.; "Published five times during the academic year."
AVAILABLE FROM	Centre for Literacy, 3040 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3Z 1A4 (single subscription $9.00 Canadian).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Literacy Across the Curriculum; v6 n1-5 Jan-Dec 1990
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Literacy; Dialects; Females; Foreign Countries; *Language Usage; Learning Disabilities; *Literacy Education; Policy Formation; Readability; *Reading Instruction; Reading Skills; Student Placement; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	Canada; *Workplace Literacy

ABSTRACT

This document consists of the four issues of a newsletter entitled "Literacy Across the Curriculum" issued during 1990. The newsletter covers articles on classroom and other topical issues, resources, and conferences and announcements related to language for learning. The following topics are discussed in volume 6: analyzing literacy/numeracy skills, preparing a simplified text, "copyright and wrong," dialects and Standard English, writing in the disciplines, women and literacy, a student exploration of literacy, learning disabilities and adult literacy, multiple messages in writing placement practice, readability and readability formulas, school literacy policies, organizational readiness for a literacy training program, a Canadian literacy skill survey, writing in photography, legal writing, family literacy, and Literacy 2000 (highlights of the conference). Number 3 in the series is a special issue devoted to workplace literacy. Numbers 4-5 are combined. Contains approximately 90 references. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (LB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Shohet
Linda
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

January 1990, Vol. 6 No. 1

Literacy across the curriculum

Language for Learning

ED339249

FL800407

Literacy and icebergs

In comparing the meanings of words to icebergs "with the tip of the iceberg representing the public aspect of meaning, resting on the submerged base of private meaning," (To Ponder, p.3) Louise Rosenblatt reminds us of the impossibility of static definitions. "Words do not function in isolation, but always in particular verbal, personal, and social contexts."

Literacy is a word that has more submerged meanings than most. In this International Literacy Year, each of us should take the time to examine some of those meanings to decide which ones of them are most relevant to our particular contexts. If we come out of this year with no more than an increased awareness of what literacy can mean and of how many literacies there are, we will not have spent the year in vain.

Robert Pattison in *On Literacy* exposes one submerged definition of the word when he compares its broad significance to the concepts connoted by the words "politics" and "economics." Searching for an understanding of the term that moves beyond the narrowness of the census bureau or the Army, he suggests that "literacy is mechanical ability with the technologies of language coupled with consciousness of language as a force in human affairs." The technologies are rhetoric, reading, and writing, but in the West over the last four hundred years, reading and writing have become privileged. Pattison's definition leaves room for social and cultural relativity. To underline this point, he notes that Homer, if we use the western definition in the twentieth century, was an illiterate because he almost certainly could neither read nor write. That clearly was not the perception of the fourth century B.C. Athenians nor is it of present-day western students who accept Homer as exemplifying the literacy of his age.

Pattison's critique of the state of literacy in contemporary North America is rooted in his position that literacy has both mechanical and critical/cultural dimensions and that most of our schools and community literacy programs concentrate on the mechanical.

The QAAL/ Dawson College Centre for Literacy, defining literacy in its broadest sense, is attempting to make links among school, community, and workplace and to move beyond the mechanical. Through this bulletin and in all our activities, we promote investigation and offer new directions to support teachers/tutors/trainers who are helping students at all stages of life achieve a critical mastery of language and of other coding systems. Our books and documents include studies and teaching materials on every conceivable aspect of literacy. We invite teachers at every level from elementary to post-graduate, community tutors/volunteers, industry trainers, union educators, interested parents to visit and to borrow materials.

Suggested reading
Robert Pattison, *On Literacy, The Politics of The Word from Homer to the Age of Rock*, Oxford UP, 1982.

INSIDE

3 **To Ponder**
4 **In The Classroom**
Analysing literacy/numeracy skills
Preparing a simplified text
6 Copyright and wrong
8 Dialects and Standard English
10 **Resources**
11 Writing in the disciplines
Women and literacy
12 Book Voyage
13 **Conferences and Announcements**

The QAAL/Dawson College Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Quebec Association for Adult Learning
and
Dawson College

announces
the formal opening of

The Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community

on Thursday February 15, 1990

Teachers from all levels, from elementary to post-graduate, community tutors/volunteers, industry trainers, union educators, and interested parents are welcome to visit the centre, to consult and to borrow its materials after February 15.

Literacy Across the Curriculum
Dawson College
3040 Sherbrooke Street West
Room 4B 1.9
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H3Z 1A4

Editor
Linda Shohet
Layout
The Hampstead Herald
Design Concept
Janice Bernath

The Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community

1 On words and icebergs

Language, we know, is a socially-generated public system of communication--the very bloodstream of any society. But it is often forgotten that language is always internalized by an individual human being in transaction with a particular environment. "Lexical concepts must be shared by speakers of a common language,...yet there is room for considerable individual difference in the details of any concept."And traces of cumulatively-funded personal experiences remain. Bates uses the image of an iceberg for the total sense of a word, with the tip of the iceberg representing the public aspect of meaning, resting on the submerged base of private meaning. The dictionary lists the public, lexical meanings of a word. No language act, however, can be thought of as totally public or totally private. Always anchored in individuals, it necessarily involves both public and private elements, the base as well as the tip of the "iceberg." And, although we speak of individual signs or words, we know that words do not function in isolation, but always in particular verbal, personal, and social contexts.

Louise M. Rosenblatt, "Writing and Reading: The Transactional Theory," Technical Report No. 416, Center for the Study of Reading, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, (January 1988)3.

2 On math education

Most of those analyzing the math literacy problem agree that a major revolution in how math is taught is in order. The problem is much more complex than persuading teachers (and parents) to allow the use of calculators, or of integrating computer technology.

Math should be viewed as "a way of thinking" that is in continual flux, says Arthur Powell, math professor from Rutgers University. However, he explains, most teachers view it as a static subject, a set of rules that divides answers strictly into right and wrong. But real mathematics should challenge students to predict outcomes, look at alternatives and propose theories--all of which require discussion and involve ambiguities.

"Myth #8: Reading is More Important Than Math," *The Literacy Beat*, (October 1988, Volume 2, no.8) 3.

3 On scientific literacy

*To ensure the scientific literacy of all students, curricula must be changed to reduce the sheer amount of material covered; to weaken or eliminate rigid subject-matter boundaries; to pay more attention to the connections among science, mathematics, and technology; to present the scientific endeavor as a social enterprise that strongly influences-and is influenced by-human thought and action; and to foster scientific ways of thinking.

*The effective teaching of science, mathematics, and technology (or any other body of knowledge and skills) must be based on learning principles that derive from systematic research and from well-tested craft experience. Moreover, teaching related to scientific literacy needs to be consistent with the spirit and character of scientific inquiry and with scientific values. This suggests such approaches as starting with questions about phenomena rather than with answers to be learned; engaging students actively in the use of hypotheses, the collection and use of evidence, and the design of investigations and processes; and placing a premium on students' curiosity and creativity.

*Educational reform must be comprehensive, focusing on the learning needs of all children, covering all grades and subjects, and dealing with all components and aspects of the educational system. It will also require that positive conditions for change be established and that public support for reform be sustained for a decade or longer.

*Reform must be collaborative. It must involve administrators, university faculty members, and community, business, labor, and political leaders, as well as teachers, parents and students themselves.

"Introduction," *Science for all Americans*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, (Summer 1989)6.

Analyzing literacy/ numeracy skills

[Below is a model of a job-skill analysis focusing on literacy/numeracy requirements. It outlines the tasks that students/workers are called upon to perform and the context in which the tasks occur. The model could be adapted to any setting either in school or in the workplace as teachers or trainers analyse particular tasks or jobs to determine when, and what types of, literacy /numeracy skills are required. L.S.]

Motor Project - Job Skills Analysis

The following job skill analysis was carried out in a training project for car mechanics in London, England. An analysis of the skills required by trainees shows that, although the project centers around practical work, there is a large amount of literacy/numeracy involved, particularly on the theory side as trainees prepare for City and Guilds exams.

1. Reading notices
Trainees have to read notices around the workplace - warning notices, etc.

2. Reading instructions
Instructions are sometimes given in written form but supervisors can help if trainees have difficulties with these.

3. Using the phone
Trainees have to use the phone to order equipment or supplies. They find it hard to rehearse mentally what they are going to say before they make their calls.

4. Extracting information from manuals
Trainees have to refer to manuals and find relevant information.

5. Measuring
Using - micrometer for measuring 1/1000.
- feeler gauges for measuring spark plug gaps
- vernier scale for measuring inside and outside, bore size
- steel rulecutting plate for welding

Trainees also have to select size of drill-smaller/larger.
Understand thickness of nuts, bolts, pins, etc.
Trainees need to understand the relevant decimals/ fractions.

6. Estimating
Trainees have to estimate drill sizes/lengths. Also weights of vehicles for safety and the length of time a job will take.

7. Weighing
Ramps.

8. Calculation of time
Work maintenance sheets, labour rates.

9. Calculation of proportion
Working out ratios - e.g. mixing fuel

10. Text books
For theory sessions

11. Manuals
For theory sessions and see 4. above.

12. Handouts
For theory sessions

13. Worksheets
For theory sessions

14. Test papers
City and Guilds practice papers

15. Copy from blackboard/O.H.P.
Trainees copy theory notes from blackboard or overhead projector.

16. Understanding diagrams
Pictures and diagrams are provided for trainees to label, colour-code.

17. Write reports
Trainees are asked to write the reports following camps and visits.

18. Make notes
Trainees are asked to write notes after watching films.

19. Answer questions in writing
For exams

20. Answer multi-choice questions
For exams

Reprinted with permission from the newsletter of the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU), London England, Summer 1989.

Preparing a simplified text to use with a group of trainees

[This guide was developed by ALBSU in a workplace literacy project in England to help supervisors prepare simplified versions of manuals. The principles can be used by any teacher or trainer to make a written text more accessible to learners. L.S.]

1. **Read and re-read the text yourself.**

2. **List the items you wish to include.**

3. **Write a rough draft for the simplification, working from this contents list.**
   When writing this draft consider these guidelines:
   (i) Consider re-arranging the order of ideas if this could make it easier to follow.
   (ii) Work to the *gist* of a section. Don't go through the text sentence by sentence.
   (iii) Try to write in sensible, everyday English, using common phrases. Avoid being childish.
   (iv) Retain essential words or phrases. There is no alternative to "accelerator" or "collet." In fact trainees may read these technical/specialist words more easily than the smaller words.
   (v) Make sure your sentences vary in length and structure. Sentences of the same length and structure make boring reading.

4. **Re-read your rough draft to get the feel of how it reads and check for points i-iv above.**

5. **Make a final version of the simplification.**
   Presentation
   (i) Make presentation clear, well spaced and attractive.
   (ii) Type if possible, or write in clear lower and upper case.
   (iii) Make line breaks in appropriate places, i.e. break material into short lines of manageable phrases, not in the middle of meaningful phrases.
   (iv) Use pictures, diagrams, charts, and labels as much as possible. This cuts down on the amount of written material needed and increases clarity.
   (v) Consider a seqence of pictures and captions.
   (vi) Some things are best presented in tabular form/flow diagram/annotated diagram.

6. **Now ask yourself the following questions:**
   (i) Does it get the information over?
   (ii) Is the information as clear as possible?
   (iii) Does the piece read smoothly and naturally?
   (iv) Is it of a suitable level for the reading abilities of particular students?

7. **Use the text with the trainees and note whether:**
   (i) They can read it smoothly - what phrases, words etc. cause trouble?
   (ii) They get the information - what would have helped them get it more easily?

You can learn more from Stage 7 than from any other stage.

Reprinted with permission from the newsletter of the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU), London, England, Summer, 1989.

Copyright and wrong

MIchael Thomas

The facts of the case

We are in the second phase of preparation of legislation on the subject of copyright, Bill C-60. This phase will culminate in a vote, possibly in the spring, on the final form of what is being called the Charter of Rights for Creators. No one questions that creators have rights. What is at issue is the impact of this legislation on the rights of students and educators.

As the legislation stands, teachers have no right to copy commercial materials except by written permission of the copyright holder. Commercial materials include textbooks, workbooks, computer disks, slides, transparencies, films and video-cassettes. Extracts not exceeding what is necessary for private use, review or research, are excepted.

Teachers may use copies of such materials under agreements signed by copyright holders or their authorized representatives, for example, copyright collectives like the Canadian Reprography Collective (Can(c)opy) or S.A.D.A. (Societe pour l'avancement des droits d'auteur). Since such permission is often difficult and time-consuming to obtain from individual copyright holders, the collectives have been formed as a means of easing and hastening the process. They are conducting negotiations for "blanket" copyright licences with ministries of education, the federal government, and school boards across the country. These negotiations are being conducted **now** with teacher representation at the level of the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

How aware are you of the impact on teaching?

How aware have you been made of the consequences for your teaching of the proposals now before the committees? Are you clear about what you would like to see included in the Bill so that your students can have adequate access to literary, scientific and technical works?

Consider what is NOT YET AGREED to by way of education exceptions.

1. Manual copying, e.g.: writing copyrighted material on a blackboard.

2. Use of extracts from copyrighted material for examination purposes.

3. Playing radio and television in classrooms.

4. Live performance of plays in schools and limited video-taping of thesefor use within the school without payment of fees.

5. Playing records and audiotapes in classrooms.

7. Off-air videotaping of news and possibly some news documentary programs.

6. Provisions for the use of photocopying not covered by agreements and a "LIMITED DAMAGE" clause restricting the amount that can be claimed for violations.

Consider also the effect of proposed per page costs (about 5c) on school budgets. There is no new money, and the costs incurred for licences are probably going to be met from already inadequate funds currently earmarked for texts.

You should be aware that licence payments will be made on the basis of quantities ascertained by sampling procedures to be carried out by teachers themselves. This will involve recording data about each item copied, including amounts and source information down to the ISBN numbers.

Restrictions on the use of computer software and video cassettes will be less onerous financially and administratively.

What can you do?

Send the letter printed on the opposite page (or your own version of it) to:

1) Your Member of Parliament

2) The Prime Minister

3) The Copyright Committee,
Ministry of Communications,
Journal North Tower,
300 Slater Street, OTTAWA
Ontario KIA OC8

Michael Thomas is Language Arts Consultant, Secondary Level, Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.

TO: Your Member of Parliament

Subject: The Federal Copyright Law: Bill C-60

Dear Sir/Madame:

Our educational community is in jeopardy.

As a result of delay and inadequacy in the proposed legislative amendments to the educational provisions on Copyright, and as a result of problems in interpretation arising out of the formulations of the Censorship legislation, Bill C-54, (in specific, sections 138 (1)(b), and 159.1 (1)), members of this community are facing a crisis over what learning materials teachers will be able to place in the hands of students.

It is vital that ministries, school boards, teachers, parents, and the public at large, understand the nature of the legal liabilities facing the educational community and its need for support, particularly in the areas of "Fair Dealing" and "Spontaneous Use", both in the realm of print and video. The legislation when passed must ensure wide and flexible access for teachers and students to literary, artistic, scientific and technical works.

To this end, we, the undersigned, ask that you, as our elected representative, initiate action to change the current federal position vis-a-vis copyright, to protect our educational community from the deleterious effects of this new legislation. Specifically we ask you:

(1) to develop administrative and budgetary procedures that will facilitate teaching and ensure adequate student access to materials, compatible with the philosophy and objectives of the curriculum;

(2) to argue- and this is of critical importance to teachers- for the introduction of a Spontaneous Use Clause similar to that in the United States, which will allow a measure of freedom of choice of teaching content (literary, artistic, scientific and technical) and somewhat reduce the burden of reprography costs to schools and to school boards;

Quebec teachers should add:

(3) to ensure adequate representation for the concerns of anglophone teachers in negotiations with the Canadian Reprography Collective (Cancopy);

(4) to take immediate steps to negotiate copyright agreements with those publishers who promote literary, artistic, scientific and technical materials among Quebec's anglophone community, as has been previously negotiated for our francophone educational colleagues.

Through these means, we invite the Canadian Government to create an environment for educational practice that is both realistic and just and has the best interest of Canada's students at heart.

Yours truly,
(Your Signature)

Dialects and Standard English

How do you effectively teach reading and writing to an adult who speaks a dialect different than your own?

[Our classrooms are filled with students who speak in a wide variety of English dialects which frustrates many teachers concerned about the deterioration of "standard English." Linguists, however, have for some time classified dialects as varieties of language, rather than as aberrations, and have come to view them as a source of linguistic enrichment that can be used to enhance language teaching. Teachers need to understand that dialects are appropriate in the homes and communities of these speakers just as standard English is appropriate in school and mainstream social settings. *The Ladder* , a Washington-based literacy newsletter, illuminated some of these issues in a discussion with Donna Christian and Walt Wolfram, co-directors of the Research Division at the Center for Applied Lingusitics (CAL), Washington D.C.. The two specialists in American dialects recently published a book on the topic, called *Dialects and Education: Issues and Answers*. It is clear that questions of dialect are important to teachers of language at all levels as much as to teachers of basic education. Following are excerpts from the interview conducted by Janet Brown. L.S.]

Q. What is a dialect?

Wolfram: A dialect is simply a variety of a language. In popular culture dialect has a negative connotation. Popular ideas about dialect reflect a lot of the stereotypes and prejudices that exist in our society.

Q. What is "standard" English?

Wolfram: Standard English is a dialect of English. With respect to pronounciation, we are really talking about different dialects. There is a standard for New England which is different for Memphis, Tennessee or New York. In one sense we are talking about a sociopolitical entity in that it has definite class, power and status connotations.

Christian: Standard English evolved as the socially acceptable form of English which can vary from region to region. But there are some commonalities across regions, especially in terms of grammar.

Q. Is there a growing understanding about dialect among educators?

Christian: There is a lot more concern for dealing with student linguistic diversity, but this hasn't changed the underlying attitude that subconciously affects people. Despite the intention of not discriminating against or punishing them because of their dialect, it still happens subtly.

Wolfram: We are a long way from overcoming the mythology and stereotypes that exist about dialects.

Q. You also state that dialect diversity does not only create problems but also "provides a valuable resource that can enrich a language program." Could you talk about this?

Christian: It is a wonderful subject for study. People don't think about language being an object of scientific inquiry but it is probably the most accessible one we have because it is all around us. We talk about developing thinking skills at school. Well, analyze language: what a great way to develop cognitive skills.

Q. Your chapter "Dialects and Language Arts" begins with a discussion of the "so-called literacy crisis." There are an estimated 27 million or more American adults who have problems with reading. How do you see the literacy issue in America today?

Christian: It is definitely a problem. A lot of times people are bemoaning what has happened to the language and saying that people don't know how to use language. But that's a very different issue from people not having the opportunity to acquire the skills and develop the behaviors that go along with being literate, whether it's in the workplace or school.

Wolfram: By the same token, there is a correlation between people who tend not to speak Standard English and those who tend to be illiterate. This raises the question of whether there is any causation. There are correlations between lots of things and illiteracy, some of them irrelevant.

We do have some ideas of ways that language differences can affect the reading process. We also have a bottom-line hunch about dialect differences and literacy. Our point...is that we are not sure what impact dialect differences make but that there are certain things about dialects that you should know if you are going to be a reading instructor -- certain things about phonics and aspects of reading comprehension that are affected by syntactical differences and things like that.

Christian: Also, since so much reading evaluation depends on reading, aloud, you need to be able to recognize what are dialect differences and what may in fact be reading problems. If reading diagnosticians don't know the difference, then they could misdiagnose either way, either not catch a problem or put a person in primers forever because they feel they are not reading accurately because that person is reading in his or her dialect.

Q. It is assumed that adults who are learning to read and write better want to do so in "standard English." Is this a valid assumption?

Christian: Yes. I think that's the key to success. There's not a lot to read that isn't in the standard English.

Wolfram: All the indications that we have, even from people who speak vernacular dialects, is that the focus is on writing and reading standard English.

Q. What about speaking "standard English"? How does this relate to reading and writing?

Wolfram: It's really complicated because, obviously, the way you speak is going to have some influence on how you may write or how you may be prone to interpret a particular sentence. The hypothesis that I am most comfortable with goes like this: The more distant your spoken language is from the language of writing and reading, the greater likelihood that the language difference will influence your reading and writing.

But if you look at situations around the world, the distance between spoken dialects of American English and written dialects is not great enough to be a causative factor affecting people's literacy. In international literacy situations, say, involving Japanese rural dialect and some of the difference dialects of Switzerland and Germany, the differences between spoken dialects and the written dialects are greater than in English. Yet they don't appear to have substantive literacy problems. When you get evidence like that, it suggests that language itself is not a causative factor. That doesn't mean that language doesn't need to be taken into account.

Q. You wrote that "bidialectalism" is a reasonable goal for a language instruction program. What does this mean and what is its value for an adult or adolescent literacy program?

Christian: Bidialectalism is the ability to use a standard variety while at the same time maintaining the native variety and being able to switch between them when the situation warrants using the language that is socially acceptable in the situation. It is just as unacceptable to use a standard variety within a home community as it is to use the home variety in a standard-speaking community.

Certainly there are many individuals who are not bidialectal but who can read and write fine. More often I think people become more bidialectal as they learn to read and write standard English.

Q. In what ways can an understanding of dialect help students to learn to read and write better? How can dialect diversity be used as an aid in the classroom?

Wolfram: I think it starts with self-image. People who feel badly about the way they talk are handicapped in acquiring education skills. An understanding that there are different dialects, that people come from different communities with different heritages, is the start. Once you get people feeling more comfortable about the way they talk, naturally you have people who are more willing to take the kinds of risks that are necessary in order to accomplish educational tasks like reading.

There are some studies that suggest that students who feel good about the way they speak when they speak vernacular dialects, who don't have all of these negative stereotypes about the way they talk, actually acquire standard English better. They understand, "Standard English is a cosmetic that I need; there is nothing fundamentally wrong with me."

Christian: It helps to understand that the written language is another variety of the language, too. They can appreciate some of the differences between speech and writing.

Q. Let's say people are working out an understanding of "bidialectalism" as a goal. What would be some useful approaches for a reading intructor?

Christian: With adults you obviously want to consider the motivational factors. Instruction needs to be functional. There is not much point in reading primers. You need to find material that is important and you need to allow for lots of input from context to support the reading so that it can develop. You would really want an eclectic approach. You would not want to push phonics, it only would be useful for a short time to get to some of the skills people rely on. You want to switch pretty quickly to a meaning-based approach.

Wolfram: Actually the closer you get to phonics the more potential there is for dialect influence. People using different dialects pronounce sounds differently, and a focus on phonics leads to lots of pronounciation differences and decoding issues.

[The Center for Applied Linguistics is a non-profit research and services organization that tackles educational, social or occupational problems having to do with language. *Dialects and Education: Issues and Answers* is available at the QAAL/ Dawson Centre for Literacy, Tel. 514-931-8731.]

Resources

[The following books and materials are available and may be borrowed from The Centre. Over the past three years, we have listed resources regularly and will continue the practice as we expand the collection. The lists are not exhaustive. They simply provide an indication of the range of materials. Books may be borrowed through inter-library loan at your institution or by calling the Centre. Documents can be consulted in the Centre from Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.. If you cannot get in during those hours, special arrangements can be made to leave documents at the Reference Desk in the Dawson College Library, 3040 Sherbrooke Street West. For information, please call Deborah Adler at 514-931-8731.]

***Books**

Bailey, Richard W., and Robin Melanie Fosheim, editors, *Literacy for Life: The Demand for Reading and Writing*, (MLA, New York), 1983.

Fearing, Bertie E., and W. Keats Sparrow, editors, *Technical Writing: Theory and Practice*, (MLA, New York),1989.

Hirsch, E.D.,Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil, *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, (Houghton-Mifflin, Boston), 1988.

Holdstein, Deborah, *Computers and Composition*, (MLA, New York), 1987.

O'Brien, Geoffrey et al, editors,*The Reader's Catalogue*, an annotated selection of more than 40,000 of the best books in print in 208 categories,(Jason Epstein, Publisher, New York) 1989.

Rush, R. Timothy, Alden J. Moe, and Rebecca L. Storlie, *Occupational Literacy Education*, (IRA, Newark, Delaware), 1986.

Trelease, Jim, *The New Read-Aloud Handbook*, (Penguin), 1989.

Robert Scholes, *Protocols of Reading*, (Yale University Press), 1989.

Walvoord, Barbara E. Fassler, *Helping Students Write Well: A Guide for Teachers in all Disciplines*, second edition, (MLA, New York), 1986.

***Selected Reports**

Science for All Americans, Project 2061 **, American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1989. A series of six reports and recommendations on literacy goals in science, mathematics, and technology.

Centre for the Study of Reading, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Fifty reports on reading, writing, thinking, and computers in literacy.

Chisman, Forrest P., *Jump Start :The Federal Role in Adult Literacy* Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, 1989

Coalition of Essential Schools & Re: Learning Project, Brown University

Community Based Literacy: Association for Community-based Education,Washington, D.C.

Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Penn State University. Eight reports on literacy and computers

Literacy & Employment Training for Women, Wider Opportunities for Women

Project on Adolescent Literacy, University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill).

Retired Faculty Community Linkage Project: Columbia University School of Social Work.

Workplace Literacy: Retailing Industry, Broadcasting Industry et al. Frontier College.

***Catalogues**

Avanti Books, 1989 Catalogue (England), list of eight hundred books for literacy teaching and beginning readers.

***In Brief**

Science for All Americans Project 2061 involves a three-phase plan of purposeful and sustained action that will contribute to the critically needed reform of education in science, mathematics, and technology:

*Phase I focused on the substance of scientific literacy. Its purpose was to establish a conceptual base for reform by spelling out the knowledge, skills, and attitudes all students should acquire as a consequence of their total school experience from kindergarten through high school.

*Phase II involves teams of educators and scientists transforming *Science for All Americans* into several alternative curriculum models for the use of school districts and states. Durng this phase, the project is also drawing up blueprints for reform related to teacher education, teaching materals and technologies, testing, the organization of schooling, education policies, and educational research.

*Phase III will be a widespread collaborative effort, lasting a decade or longer, in which many groups active in educational reform will use the resources of Phases I and II to move the nation toward scientific literacy.

Some questions about writing in the disciplines

[*Research and Scholarship on Writing in the Disciplines* is a volume being planned as part of a new MLA series. It will delineate and explore theoretical, pedagogical, and socio-political issues central to writing in the disciplines as experienced at a variety of types of institutions, (e.g. research universities and community colleges), and in a variety of types of programs,(e.g. liberal arts, technical, professional programs). In their call for proposals, editors Anne Herrington and Charles Moran from the Department of English, University of Massachusetts, raised a series of questions about writing in the disciplines that could double as topics of discussion in either English departments or in "writing/literacy across the curriculum" projects.]

1. What is the history of "Writing in the Disciplines"? And what historical, political, intellectual, social, and pedagogical forces have shaped its present? What are the aims, the staffing, the pedagogies, and the impact on institutions and writing programs of current cross-disciplinary programs? Also, what is the appropriate role of the English department, or literature and writing teachers, in writing in the disciplines?

2. What does it mean to "write in a discipline?" For a faculty member engaged in research and publication? For an undergraduate or graduate student? In relation to students, one might consider broader educational or literacy questions: What are the functions for writing in school and specific classrooms? How do students experience writing in specific classroom settings?

3. Since writing in the professional world of, say, Physics or Nursing is ineluctably different from writing in the academic world of the undergraduate Physics or Nursing course, what is the appropriate relationship between the writing one does in a science or professional discipline and the writing one assigns/teaches in an undergraduate course? One might consider not only courses for majors, but also general education courses.

4. What is an academic discourse community? Is this a valid or useful concept? What are its distinguishing features? How does one enter and what might be the psychological or social costs or gains of that entry? Is the term "genre" useful in thinking about writing in the disciplines? What does it mean to "read" in a discipline? Are there connections between disciplinary "writing" and the broader "culture" of the discipline?

5. In what ways need "writing in the disciplines" programs consider cultural diversity? Gender issues?

[Some of these questions will be addressed by Elaine Maimon in her workshop,"Thinking, Reasoning, and Writing," on March 9,1990 at Dawson College.]

Wider Opportunities

Combining Literacy and Employment Training for Women

Executive Summary

A low-income, single mother who wants to improve her basic skills faces a complex web of barriers that inhibits her efforts to participate in literacy programs. The barrier cited most frequently is the difficulty of finding accessible, affordable child care, but finances, housing, health, transportation, family problems, and social pressures can all become major obstacles.

In addition, women struggle with psychological barriers such as low self-esteem and fear of failure. Impatience with the slow pace of daily progress is another stumbling block. Many trainees feel strong pressure for an immediate source of income. Living on the edge financially, they are reluctant to make long-range plans.

Literacy providers themselves often inadvertently place barriers in the path of potential participants by scheduling classes at night, for example, when child care is more difficult to arrrange, or by meeting in public school buildings, which low-income women may associate with past failures. Teaching students with a wide range of skill levels together in one class can also create barriers to progress, as the slower students may feel embarrassed, while the others become bored or frustrated.

The five literacy programs covered in the case studies of the WOW project have developed philosophies, strategies, and support services focused on the needs of low-income mothers.

Publications concerning literacy and women are available from:

Wider Opportunities for Women
1325 G Street N.W. (Lower Level)
Washington, D.C. 20005
Phone: (202) 638-3143

Executive Summary of the Female Single Parent Literacy Project Case Studies.

Funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

The Book Voyage, an International Year of Literacy Project

Canada's Book Voyage is part of an international project of the International Task Force on Literacy, which will provide a unique opprtunity for the voices of literacy learners to be heard globally. A series of books will travel from literacy centre to literacy centre, from village to town, from country to country during International Literacy Year, 1990. Learners will write, draw, and express their messages in the books, to share with others in the world. At the end of the year, a giant book with pages from all over the world will be presented to the United Nations.

In Canada, the Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) is initiating 12 Learners' Books, to circulate in each province and territory. Canada's Book Voyage will be launched in Ottawa, at the Parliament Buildings, on January 25, 1990. A "blank" Book will be presented to a representative learner from each province or territory who will bring it home to begin the Book Voyage in their home province or territory. Literacy learners from all parts of Canada will fill the pages of these books, creating their collective voice to share with the rest of Canada and with the world. At the end of 1990, MCL will produce a Canadian Learners' Book, with a selection of pages from each province and territory. MCL will also select a representative sample of contributions to become part of the International Learners' Book.

The purposes of the Book Voyage are:

1) To involve learners themselves in International Literacy Year, by creating their own collective cultural project.

2) To create links between literacy groups in different parts of Canada and create feelings of solidarity with learners everywhere.

3) To raise public awareness of literacy in Canada and to keep literacy high on the political agenda during the Decade of Literacy, 1990 to 2000.

Quebec's Book Voyage will be launched in Montreal on February 15,1990.
For details, contact Ann Gauvin, Coordinator of the Quebec Literacy Working Group, c/o The Eastern Quebec Regional School Board, Sillery QC, 418-688-8733.

BOOK
VOYAGE

INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY YEAR

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Reading '90
"Language and Learning"
York University
4700 Keele, Street North York,
Ontario M3J 1P3 (416) 736-5025
February 14-16, 1990

National Association for Developmental Education (NADE)
14th Annual Conference including
The International
Forum on Access to Higher
Education
Westin Hotel at Copley Place
Boston, MA
February 28 - March 3,1990

TESOL
San Francisco
March 1990

Conference on College Composition and Communication
Chicago, IL
March 21-24,1990

Commonwealth Institute Workshop
"Literacy: Questions of People, Language and Power
London, U.K.
April 6-7,1990

NATE Annual Conference
"Encompassing the Curriculum"
University of Manchester, U.K.
April 9-11,1990

Springboards 1990
Theme: Faces of Literacy
Montreal Convention Centre
April 19-20, 1990
This year Springboards will host the
Laurentian Regional
Conference of the International
Reading Association

Special Education '90
York University
4700 Keele Street, North York
Ontario M3J 1P3 (416) 736-5025
May 3, 4, 1990

Canadian Council of Teachers of English
National Conference
May 8-12,1990
Halifax, N.S.
Deadline: February 28,1990

Inkshed VII
Marginalia and Other Rhetorics
May 12-14, 1990
Halifax, N.S.

Mathematics '90
York University
4700 Keele Street, North York
Ontario M3J 1P3 (416) 736-5025
May 24, 25, 1990

Association of Canadian Community Colleges
Rendezvous '90
Holland College
Charlottetown, P.E.I.
May 28-30,1990

National Project on Computers and College Writing Conference
June 1-3, 1990
Vista Hotel
New York, NY

Tenth Annual Conference on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
McGill University
Montreal, Quebec
June 16 -19, 1990
Deadline for proposals: January
30,1990

Martha's Vineyard Summer Workshops

1990 Institute on Writing and Teaching
Session I, July 2-13,1990
Session II, July 16-30, 1990
Courses open to all teachers and
administrators,
elementary through college levels.
Teams of teachers encouraged.
Information: Edward Jossens, 406
Holmes Hall,
Northeastern University, Boston, MA
02115,
Tel.: (617) 437-3637.

Council of Writing Program Administrators
Annual Workshop/Conference 1990
Status, Standards, and Quality:
The Challenge of Wyoming
Workshop: July 23-26
Conference: July 26-28
Portland State University
Portland, Oregon.

National Conference of the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education
"Partnerships in Continuing
Education"
McGill University
Montreal, Quebec
June 17-21,1990

45th International Conference of the Correctional Educational Association
(Focusing on Literacy Issues)
Simon Fraser University
Vancouver, B.C.
July,1990

The Adult Literacy and Technology National Conference
St. Paul Radisson Hotel
St. Paul, Minnesota
July 18-21,1990

MLA Conference on Literacy
"Responsibilities for Literacy:
Communities, Schools and Workplaces"
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
September 13-16,1990

Invitational Conference "World Literacy in the Year 2000: Research and Policy Dimensions"
Literacy Research Center of
the University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennslyvania
October 4-7,1990

Academic Alliance of English Teachers
Media Literacy: Defining it and Teaching it

Leader: Barry Duncan, President of The Association for Media Literacy
Date: Thursday, February 8,1990
Time: 7:30 P.M.- 9:30 P.M.
Place: Dawson College
Multi-purpose Room, 5-B16
3040 Sherbrooke Street W.
(Atwater metro)

Call for Proposals
Proposals are now being accepted for *Writing, Reading, and Technology: Research and Practice*, the third volume in the Modern Language Association's series, RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP IN COMPOSITION. Deadline: February 1,1990.

Literacy Across the Curriculum Workshops Winter 1990
Place : Dawson College

May 15-16,1990
Developing Guides Across the Disciplines to Help Students Read More Effectively
Leader: Harvey S. Wiener, City University of New York.
Please note: this workshop was rescheduled from January 8-9.

February 9-10, 1990
Writing to Learn
Leader: Laura and Toby Fulwiler, University of Vermont

March 9,1990
Thinking, Reasoning, and Writing
Leader: Elaine P. Maimon, Queens College, CUNY

Details of these conferences available in LAC office, Tel.(514) 931-8731, ext. 1412.

The Quebec Reading Association in collaboration with the QAAL/Dawson College Centre for Literacy and Scholastic Books presents:

KIDS, PARENTS, AND BOOKS
A Special Afternoon of Events for Parents, Grandparents and Children

Date: Sunday, February 11,1990
2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Place: Dawson College
3040 Sherbrooke Street West,
Montreal, Quebec, H3Z 1A4
Speaker: Priscilla Lynch, author and consultant

Priscilla Lynch, author of *Using Big Books and Predictable Books*, will discuss ways of helping children develop a love for reading and ways of supporting language learning in home and school. Events will include art, drama, and read-aloud activities for children as well as a Book Fair.

Space limited.
Fees: Adult $5.00; children and grandparents $2.00. For information and to reserve places, call 670-7680. Money will be collected at the door.

REMINDER:
This issue is the first of volume 6. If you have not renewed your subscription, please send a cheque.

Literacy Across the Curriculum is published five times during the academic year by The QAAL/Dawson College Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community.

Single subscription	$ 7.50
Multiple subscription (10)	$36.00
Multiple subscription (20)	$65.00

To subscribe, complete this form and mail it with your cheque to:

The Centre for Literacy
Dawson College
3040 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3Z 1A4

I enclose a cheque for: $ 7.50
$36.00
$65.00

Make cheques payable to The Centre for Literacy.
On multiple orders outside Montreal, please add $3.00 additional postage.

Name: ____________________
Institution: ____________________
Address: ____________________

February 1990, Vol. 6 No. 2

Literacy across the curriculum

Language for Learning

"Stanley and Iris" and Reality

It takes some daring for a Hollywood producer to make a feature film about adult illiteracy; it is not a gripping or glamorous subject, but one producer has taken the challenge with "Stanley and Iris." Robert De Niro portrays Stanley, a middle-aged blue-collar worker who has never learned to read and write but has survived through innate intelligence and frequent moves from one menial job to another. Jane Fonda, recently widowed and still grieving, is Stanley's co-worker, caught in a deadening assembly-line job decorating cakes in a dingy bakery. Her frankness in naming Stanley's problem eventually leads him to ask her for help, and we follow with considerable empathy his long struggle for control of written language.

The film captures with sensitivity the isolation, even anguish, of being unable to sign a receipt, or more distressing, a death certificate for a father. It also brings alive the frustration of the struggle and the temptation to just give it all up.

Yet, if it did all this so well, why did I leave the theatre with a sense of disquiet? Perhaps because of the romanticization. Clearly Stanley was as motivated by Iris' sensual presence as by the will to learn. Fine. Perhaps because he was also presented as an unusually talented man bordering on electronic genius. This portrayal certainly dispels that myth that illiterate adults are stupid or retarded, but it also may create the illusion that most are inordinately endowed, which is equally mythical. The crowning affront was Stanley's miraculous ascent from recent learner to corporate boardroom within two years. In all the literacy success stories I have read, I have never come across a tale of quite such stunning transformation.

Only one week after that screening, my uneasiness was confirmed when I when in the launch of Quebec's Book Voyage. [*As part of this project during International Literacy year, a blank book has been presented to a literacy learner from each province where the book will be circulated among learner groups who will fill it with their writings. At the end of 1990, the Movement for Canadian Literacy will publish a selection from all the provinces and territories and choose some representative selections to become part an International Learners' Book.*] The conference room was packed with learners and teachers from across Quebec.

As I looked around at the proud, excited learners, not one resembled Robert De Niro. It was evident that most of them suffered from a multitude of social ills in addition to illiteracy. Many were poor and unemployed, but all of them shared a sense of hope that their new commitment to learning would make a substantial difference in their lives. For many of them, it will; no one, however, will make a feature film about their lives (documentary, perhaps), and none of them will be in a corporate boardroom two years from now.

(continued on page 14)

INSIDE

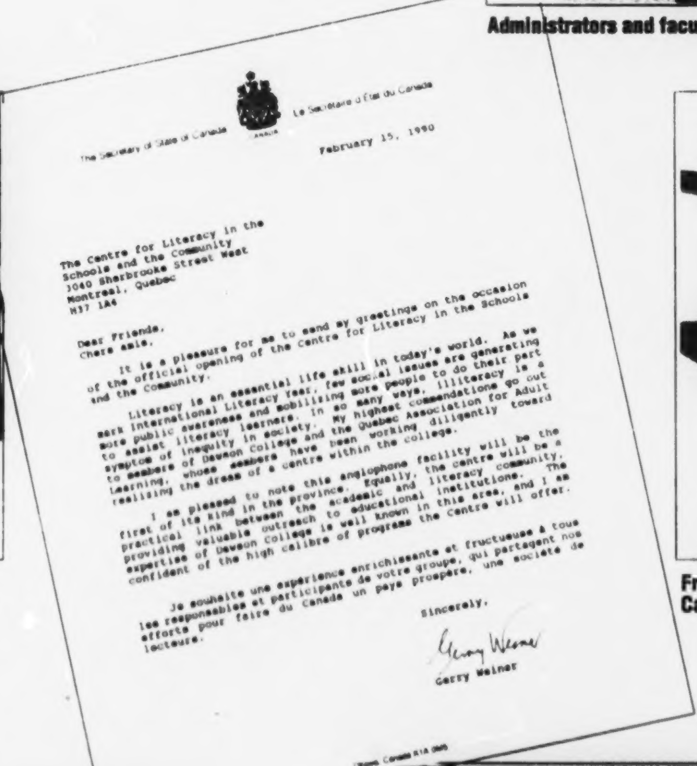
3 **To Ponder**
4 **In The Classroom**
A Student Exploration of Literacy
7 Learning Disabilities and Adult Literacy
10 Multiple Messages in Writing Placement Practice
12 Readability and Readability Formulas
15 **Resources and Conferences**

The QAAL/Dawson College Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community

The Centre for Literacy Official Opening February 15, 1990

Administrators and faculty members, Dawson College

Gerry Kelly
Director General, Dawson College



The Secretary of State of Canada   Le Secrétaire d'État du Canada

February 15, 1990

The Centre for Literacy in the
Schools and the Community
3040 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec
H3Z 1A4

Dear Friends,
Chers amis,

It is a pleasure for me to send my greetings on the occasion of the official opening of the Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community.

Literacy is an essential life skill in today's world. As we mark International Literacy Year, few social issues are generating more public awareness and mobilizing more people to do their part to assist literacy learners. In so many ways, illiteracy is a symptom of inequity in society. My highest commendations go out to members of Dawson College and the Quebec Association for Adult Learning, whose members have been working diligently toward realising the dream of a centre within the college.

I am pleased to note this anglophone facility will be the first of its kind in the province. Equally, the centre will be a practical link between the academic and literacy community, providing valuable outreach to educational institutions. The expertise of Dawson College is well known in this area, and I am confident of the high calibre of programs the Centre will offer.

Je souhaite une expérience enrichissante et fructueuse à tous les responsables et participants de votre groupe, qui partagent nos efforts pour faire du Canada un pays prospère, une société de lecteurs.

Sincerely,

Gerry Weiner

Gerry Weiner

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0M5

Francine Fournier, Secretary General
Canadian Commission for UNESCO

Charles Joyner, Director, Adult Education, Dawson College,
Linda Shohet, Director, Centre for Literacy,
and Norma Passarretti, Quebec Regional Director, Secretary of State of Canada.

Ann Gauvin, Coordinator, Quebec Literacy Working Group,
Robert Nixon, President, Quebec Association for Adult Learning,
and Norma Passarretti

1 On untaught lessons

My disquiet about reading experts is that they decontextualize reading in order to describe it. They are casual about texts. Those whom I want to call 'expert readers'- critics, subject specialists, writers, English professors, publishers' editors and text consultants- make the same kind of mistake. They believe that there exists a group of well-read who have a common background of texts which they all know and to which reference can be made at all times with common understanding by those 'in the know'. But they have very little curiosity about how readers in their specialism come to know how to read the texts of their subject. I guess that any doctor, chemist, physicist or medievalist will tell you that he/she did nothing different from the reading most people do, except that his/her texts were special. That is obvious.

My main point is very simple. We learned to read, competently and sensitively, because we gave ourselves what Sartre called 'private lessons', by becoming involved in what we read. We also found we could share what we read with other people, our friends, our colleagues, our opponents even, when we argued with them. The reading lessons were not part of a course of reading, except of the course we gave ourselves in our interactions with texts. If we can at this point acknowledge the importance of these untaught lessons, I think we should look at them more closely, beginning with the beginners.

Margaret Meek, "How texts teach what readers want to learn," *The Word for Teaching is Learning*, (Boynton/Cook/Heineman, 1988)

2 On navigating with books

Books help us find our way. They serve as sextant and compass as we enter strange lands; like Hansel's bits of bread, they can lead us home again. The novelist and travel writer Bruce Chatwin observes that "The Yanghan tongue- and by inference all language - proceeds as a system of navigation. Named things are fixed points, aligned or compared, which allow the speaker to plot the next move" (*In Patagonia*, 1977, p. 136). Books are like that too. They are fixed points from which we set forth; by aligning and comparing them we are better able to plot our next moves.

I picked from a paperback rack in 1959 a copy of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. I was sixteen and waiting for a train in a small northern Wisconsin town. It was, I suppose, a combination of being sixteen, travelling by train, and the sheer energy of Kerouac's nonstop, expansive, and uniquely American prose that captivated and transformed me. By the time I reached Chicago I had not only begun the book a second time but had also been changed in a dramatic way. I spent the next ten years or so travelling about the country and world with *On the Road* as a fixed point.

Before Kerouac and while in an inner city parochial grade school, it had been a series of books about tough Catholic boys like myself. I'm sure by most literary standards they were mediocre stuff: I never again have been able to find a copy of *Nice Going, Red,* or *Brass Knuckles*. But they helped me plot my moves and discover who I was. And earlier it was a beautifully illustrated edition of *The Tales of the Arabian Nights* that I read on vacations that showed me the mystery, adventure, and imaginative power of language and stories. And even earlier it was *Little Lulu* comic books that my older sister shared with me that I was able to read before I started school.

Since then there have been other important touchstones from which I've ventured and to which I return. William Blake's prophetic poetry remains my North Star. Herman Melville continues to teach me about the nature of the human heart each time I read *Moby Dick*. Gabriel Garcia Marquez has shown me that eternity and infinite possibilities exist in the human mind and creative imagination. And most recently, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* has demonstrated the redemptive power of love and forgiveness.

All of these books have helped me find my way and continue to help me navigate into the future. Each reader of this commentary can construct her or his own personal map. In a very real sense I partially am what I am because of these books. With hindsight I can see how one led me to the other; I can chart my course with relative exactness. However, while I was travelling to this point in my life I had no map; it was all steering by the stars and intuition. And that's what books are to a great extent: stars that not only guide us but also marvelously appear, I don't know how, when we most need them.

Francis E. Kazemek, "Navigating with Books," (*Journal of Reading*, October 1989)4.

A Student Exploration of Literacy

by Joan Hennessey

My Grade X students were intrigued when, in the course of talking to them about International Literacy Year, I mentioned that many people who are illiterate find ways of avoiding confronting their problem. For example, I told them, illiterate people sometimes ask others to read for them, using the excuse, "I forgot my glasses." The students were incredulous when I told them that some people in our society cannot read labels on medicine bottles or other such simple directions, which could mean the difference between life and death.

Looking at the class, I realized that I had an opportunity not often afforded to English teachers. In front of me was a group of motivated, high achievers (all of them on the school Honour Roll) whose education, formal and informal, had apparently equipped them well to cope with their school work, as well as with other challenges the future probably held for them. I suggested to them an assignment which would require them to explore the origins of their literacy.

To introduce the assignment, I gave them an outline of the kinds of things I thought they could examine in order to determine how they "grew up literate." Then, starting with an article from the October, 1989, *Journal of Reading*, entitled "Navigating With Books" by Francis E. Kazemek(see To Ponder 2, p. 3), we read a number of articles by people remembering how they had learned to read and write. It is fairly easy to find such material. The students wrote individual responses to the articles prior to group and class discussions. These articles allowed the students to compare their reading and writing experiences with those of others, and to reflect on these experiences, especially ones which would be interesting to recount in an essay on the origins of their own literacy.

I then introduced them to the concept of "loop writing" as described by Peter Elbow in *Writing with Power* (1981). Loop writing is directed "free writing" (also discussed in the book) that helps students generate ideas about a topic and expand their point of view. It is a technique designed to produce "raw writing" which can then be used in what Elbow refers to as the "collage essay." The collage essay is not a single, perfectly connected train of thought. It consists of fragments which can be arranged without the usual transitions from one paragraph to the next. It is an ideal way to use the loop writing procedures that the students chose: first thoughts, prejudices, dialogues, stories, scenes, portraits, and looking forward to the 21st century. [Although not all of the students chose to do a collage essay - many did a traditional essay - I showed them some examples from Elbow's book.]

After writing first drafts of the essay, the students participated in a peer evaluation activity before completing the assignment. Most of them used a word processor.

I did all of the activities along with the students, and shared my experiences and ideas with them. Among other things, I showed them a letter I had written to my mother when I was seven years old.

I think the assignment was a useful one. One student wrote in her conclusion, "From writing this essay, I learned a lot about my own growth as a literate person, and also about literacy in other people. Also, I got to relive some almost forgotten memories. I expected it to be very difficult to write this essay, but once I got started, the ideas just kept coming." Other students felt the same way, and I know that I too called up some experiences I had not thought about for many years.

The results are, in most cases, engaging personal stories of experiences which have helped the students develop as literate young people. I was particularly intrigued to discover that out of a class of twenty-six, only five or six identified English as their mother tongue. Several students of Oriental origin had spoken neither French nor English before going to kindergarten, and some of them began in a French school at that time, switching to an English school later. Many of the students who considered themselves French started school in English, while at least two students whose mother tongue is English, started school in French. One student in the class was Polish and did not speak a word of English when she came to Canada three years ago. Another student named Swiss German as his mother tongue.

Joan Hennessy teaches English at Quebec High School in Quebec City. This assignment has evaluation, bibliographical, and peer response components which are available from The Centre.

The assignment

Growing up Literate

This is a chance for you to explore how you learned to read and write, and to tell the story of how you grew up to become the literate person you are today.

In the course of this project you will think back to your earliest memories related to:

listening
radio, people, stories told orally

speaking
learning to talk, first words, informal and formal speaking

reading
being read to, learning to read, reading experiences in and out of school,
availability of books in and out of the home,experiences with stories, poetry, non-fiction, even reference books

writing
learning to write, writing experiences in and out of school

viewing
movies, TV

sharing
of the above experiences with parents, teachers, brothers, sisters, friends

Pre-Writing Activities

1. Readings - other people writing about how they learned to read and write
2. Responding to the readings
3. Discussion of the readings and responses
4. Interviewing your parents
5. Loop Writing on the topic of 'Growing up Literate'

Growing up Literate

Now that you have done some thinking and writing about how you became literate - and are continuing to develop your literacy- you are ready to write an essay explaining to an audience of people who are interested, the kinds of experiences that you think have made you the literate person that you are.

Proposed structure for the essay

1. Introduction
•statement of your ideas about literacy and illiteracy in general, what it means to be literate etc. (Refer to your loop writing on First thoughts and Prejudices).

2. Summary of responses to readings
•Pick out two or three interesting things and comment.

3. Looking Back - I Remember
•stories of learning to read and write- inside and outside of school; scenes-good moments, bad moments, special moments (awards? rewards?)

Portraits
•yourself as a reader or writer of other people's portraits; people who come to mind when you think of learning to read and write

Places
•Can you recall places where you liked to read or write?

Influences
•special books, books that helped you "find your way"
-TV programs
-radio
-films

•the effect on literacy of learning to read and write in more than one language

4. Looking Forward to the 21st Century
What will it mean to be literate in the 21st Century?

5. Conclusions
•What have you learned from doing this essay?

See the following page for samples of the students' work.

Excerpts from the essays:

As I look into the past, I notice that when I was younger, reading seemed like a chore to me. But now, I consider reading a leisure activity, and I enjoy it tremendously. When I am reading, usually in bed, I am transported into a whole new life. I am a totally different person. When I am having trouble in this life, I can just pick up a book and start another life.

Stella Martin

My community librarian, Mrs. Hogan, stands out in my mind when I think back to my childhood. I would spend a lot of time at the library. I recall sitting on the big pillows in the kids' corner and reading for hours. I don't remember what books I took out of the library, but my mother tells me that I would leave with an armful of books.

Darlene McBain

At the age of five I made an attempt at writing a book of poetry for my mother. After filling one page of the scribbler I planned to give it to her in, I lost all interest in the activity, and I moved on to doing something else. Although I never finished it, I still have the "book". When I look back on this incident, I laugh. I was determined to become a writer, but I did not have the perserverence it took to write a whole book.

Sarah Allen

I like to go to my grandma's. Sometimes when I would be tired of playing with my cousins, I would go to the forest and climb my favourite young oak tree. Sitting comfortably among green leaves, breathing the smell of the forest, I would read for hours. I will never forget these moments.

Olga Pawluczyk

One thing I am sure of is that I will never become a writer. I know that I don't have a knack for it. Writing for oneself is satisfying, however.

Reading is different. When I read a novel, sometimes when it is very good, I find myself in the shoes of a character. Some of the stories I find I can relate to. They are somewhat similar to my life.

Caroline Chan

A proud moment for me was when I won the award for proficiency in English in Secondary Two. I was extremely pleased to win it because I was very fond of my English teacher, and it made me happy to think that she thought of me as a good reader and writer.

Karen Loo

I feel that it is important to be encouraged, not only by our parents, but also by our teachers. The person who reassured me in grade two was my teacher, Mrs. Law. She always had a warm smile on her face, and she definitely had a positive attitude. She would tell us what we did incorrectly, but never in a negative manner. She was always willing to give us extra help. When our homework was done right, she would offer us some "scratch 'n sniff" stickers to reward us. She was surely one of the greatest teachers. It was easy to note that she loved teaching.

Sharada Sharma

When I was in grade three, the most precious place I had was an old bathtub which was in our house at the time. It was hidden in a recess under the staircase. I would pile up blankets and pillows there and read for hours about Narnia, Nesbit's five children, Judy Bloom's characters, or even just sit there and write my own stories or imagine them, while looking at the strange curved legs of the old bathtub. It was truly an escape for me. Unfortunately, we do not live in that house anymore, but I often conjure up my old dreams in bed or in the shower.

Anne-Marie Fleury

When I was little I knew only how to speak French. That was normal, of course, as my parents as well as all my relatives were French (though most spoke fluent English too). My grandmother's next-door neighbour in Ottawa often babysat me, but she spoke no French, so I learned English from her.

Shortly after my sister was born, we moved to Toronto. From then on, everything became English. I learned to speak it fluently after a while. My sister was raised in that language and we spoke it at home; but I started to lose my French.

When I was five, we moved to Nova Scotia, where my brother was born. There, I lost most of my French, and my brother grew up in English, just like my sister. In junior high, howver, I had two years of French Immersion before moving here to Quebec last year, where I have regained quite a bit of my native language.

Jerome Lavigne

Learning Disabilities and Adult Literacy: Debunking the Myths

by Ricki Goldstein

* A Definition of Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders due to identifiable or inferred central nervous system dysfunction. Such disorders may be manifested by delays in early development and/or difficulties in any of the following areas: attention, memory, reasoning, coordination, communication, reading, spelling, calculation, social competence, and emotional maturation.

Learning disabilities are intrinsic to the individual, and may affect learning and behaviour in any individual including those with potentially average, average, or above average intelligence.

Learning disabilities are not due primarily to visual, hearing or motor handicaps, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or environmental disadvantage, although they may occur concurrently with any of these.

Learning disabilities may arise from genetic variations, biochemical factors, events in the pre-to post-natal period, or any other subsequent events resulting in neurological impairment.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC)

* On Learning Disabilities and Illiteracy

In simpler terms, learning disabilities affect people with reasonable intelligence, who, in spite of their intelligence, have significant difficulties dealing with information in the conventional manner.Many people with learning disabilities have problems with reading. But we cannot state either that the majority of those who have learning disabilities are functionally illiterate or that the majority of those who are functionally illiterate have learning disabilities. The exact statistical correlation has simply not been fully explored. However, there is no question that all those who work in the literacy field should be aware of learning disabilities and of their implication for learning to read.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO)

* On Learning Disabilities and Equal Access

Educational legislation must guarantee access to equal opportunity for all. In this context equal opportunity means the right to an education which will assure child and adult the opportunity to reach and exercise his/her full potential.

Recent studies on illiteracy have demonstrated that for too many Canadians barriers exist that deprive them of this basic right. We believe that if all persons are to receive "equal protection and benefit of the law" (section 15(1) of the Constitution), it is the responsibility of the government at all levels to identify the causes of illiteracy in order to remove those barriers. We further believe that whatever the causes, major contributory factors are the lack of early identification of potential learning disabilities and/or other learning problems and the very limited resources for remediation/accommodation of specific learning disabilities.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC)

(continued on next page)

The invisible handicap

The Spring 1988 issue of The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada newsletter reported that 5% to 10% is a reasonable estimate of the population affected by learning disabilities, and that the prevalence is clearly somewhat higher among socio-economically disadvantaged populations, and higher in males than in females. Most studies of the prevalence of learning disabilities have been of preadolescent populations. A few follow-up studies of affected children show that most continue to have related problems as adults.

There are five categories of learning disabilities: visual, auditory, motor, organizational and conceptual. Attention deficits and hyperactivity commonly accompany learning disabilities.

Often called "the invisible handicap," learning disabilities are a cluster of different thought and behaviour problems that confuse and frustrate approximately 10% of the general population, according to The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. Fifty percent of adult literacy students are estimated to have learning disabilities.

The exceptions

Many students with learning disabilities go on to post-secondary education and successful careers. In fact, some become rich and famous. Many noteworthy scholars, politicians, artists, entertainers, entrepreneurs, athletes and professionals have had to struggle with learning disabilities. Serious weaknesses in one area seem to have spurred these people on to develop exceptional strengths in other areas.

Famous dyslexics include Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Auguste Rodin, Woodrow Wilson, General George Patton, Nelson Rockefeller, and Leonardo da Vinci. Contemporary public figures who describe themselves as learning disabled include former U.S. Senator Mike Gravel, sportcaster and former Olympic decathlon winner Bruce Jenner and actor Tom Cruise. Cher, another famous dyslexic, speaks candidly about her school difficulties, and admits she still cannot make a long-distance call because she can't remember a string of eleven numbers. Nonetheless, she has managed to overcome or compensate for the obvious difficulty of learning her lines.

The rule

Most learning disabled adults, however, are not rich or famous. Ashamed, embarrassed and broken, adults with learning disabilities often perceive themselves as stupid, and resist remediation for a long time. Many are just beginning to return to school to improve their education. Instructing these adults is a relatively new concept. Only recently have psychologists and educators realized that learning disabilities are not a problem that children outgrow. The adult may mask the handicap, but still remains impaired.

Learning disabilities have almost as great an impact on social and emotional development as they do on mental development. Because the symptoms are so easy to misdiagnose, many adults grow up misunderstanding their problems, thereby failing to get the necessary remediation and support. All these conditions lead to varying degrees of emotional scarring.

Adults with learning disabilities have been around for some time, but only recently have we begun to distinguish them from people who are unable to learn due to other problems, such as low intelligence, poor motivation, emotional instability, lack of opportunity or lack of early stimulation.

Diagnosis in adults

Diagnosis is much more difficult in adults than it is in children. For one thing, adults mask their disabilities or compensate. Little research has been done in the area of adult learning disabilities, so few diagnostic tools are available. Experienced educators and psychologists must use assessment tools developed for children or their own interpretive skills to tease out information from adults. Fortunately, adults are good self-reporters, so in-depth interviews are useful. Using a combination of these methods, a practitioner can identify the student's abilities and disabilities with remediation in mind, and compensatory strategies can be planned.

Specific characteristics such as the following not only identify students with learning disabilities but indicate areas that may need remediation: articulation problems; difficullty with instructions; difficulty discriminating sounds(e.g. consonant clusters), or difficulty with auditory retrieval(e.g. remembering names).Taking the time to interview students will likely elicit language problems such as difficulty understanding complex sentences (e.g. sentences with relative clauses).

Another simple diagnostic technique is to evaluate student writing. It may look childish, and may contain any combination of the following problems: "b" instead of "d" or vice-versa, a mix of cursive writing and printing, spelling errors, particularly in words of low semantic value, incorrect use of homonyms, a mix of inappropriate capital and small letters and omissions.

Students with learning disabilities will often confine themselves to simple words, yet their ideas will illustrate that they are quite intelligent.

Other diagnostic tools include tests that measure visual and auditory processing problems, visual-spatial problems, vocabulary, learning rate, etc. Again, the findings will indicate areas that require remedial work.

Remediation

While the whole language approach is now highly recommended for children because of the richness of language it brings them, it has not proven to be that successful with dyslexic children. Normally, children who use the whole language approach begin to generalize about how the language works. Children with learning disabilities usually do not. They must be taken aside and taught through an intellectual approach using sound-symbol relationships. Because little research has been done with adults, it can only be assumed that they will follow the same pattern.

While practice is recommended to gain fluency, practice can be boring. Adults, like children, must be encouraged to practice. Games and tongue twisters seem to work with children--they enjoy the challenge. The same is true of adults. Getting adults to read as many low-level, high-interest novels as possible is also useful because the books provide repetition of vocabulary.

The more a student writes, the better, but the writing should be made as non-threatening as possible. The adult is especially likely to see the benefits of writing for real purposes, e.g. letters to family, notes to teachers, letters of complaint. Emphasis should be on communication first. Many adults are slow to understand this stress on communication; instead, they focus on spelling and other mechanical problems, and get hung up on them. Once the idea of communication is firmly established and the adults are writing purposefully, they can be given a checklist of mechanical aspects to go through when refining a piece of writing.

For some students, printing is easier than cursive writing. For others, cursive writing is easier. Students should write in the way that is easiest for them. Some students who find printing and cursive too difficult find it easier to type. Both writing and editing have proven to be more palatable on the computer, which has been an excellent motivator for some literacy students. As long as they write, it shouldn't matter how.

The kinesthetic approach is highly recommended for adults with learning disabilities. Tracing words on sand paper or just tracing words means that the tactile sense is involved. Spelling, for instance, can be helped by writing, tracing and saying the words. The use of computers and typewriters enhances the multi-sensory approach.

Compensatory strategies can be a great help to dyslexics. These include taped books, memory aids such mnemonic rhymes, acronyms, riddles, and reliance on dictionary. Adults who use compensatory strategies often look upon them as cheating. It is important to reinforce the idea that these strategies are fair game in learning.

Learning style is important. We all have strengths and weaknesses. As adults, we are aware of how we learn best. Some of us write everything down, while others must have everything repeated in order to remember it. Learners are no different. Some are visual learners while others are auditory learners. Still others learn by a combination of these modes, as well as by other senses, such as touch.

The "teach to the ability/teach to the disability" debate still rages. Again, there is no firm answer, no panacea. Each case must be treated individually. Essentially, after a thorough student evaluation, trial and error is required to determine which technique or combination of techniques works best with each student.

Post-secondary education and the learning disabled

Colleges and universities are beginning to recognize the special needs of learning-disabled students. They arrange for such classroom accommodations as untimed tests, textbooks on tape for dyslexic students and assigned note-takers.

Other schools go further still. They have put together comprehensive programs that include group counselling, special study skills classes and individual tutoring. Several years ago, the College Entrance Examination Board began to allow students with certain learning disabilities to take untimed, sometimes oral, College Board tests.

In an educational setting, taped lectures, calculators, word processors with a spelling checker, hand-held spelling checkers and extra time to complete exams are all fair accommodations for the student with learning disabilities. Other considerations might include making information available both orally and in writing to these students or having them work in distraction-free environments.

Conclusion

Again, it is important to remember that generally speaking, people with learning disabilities are of potentially average, average, or above average intelligence. No words are strong enough to express the tragedy of losing the potentially valuable contribution of this segment of society.

We need adequate funding to develop tools to identify and assess adults with learning disabilities, and to conduct research on adult remediation and compensatory strategies. The costs may seem high, but the rewards are clear.

Ricki Goldstein coordinates RECLAIM, a Montreal-based adult literacy program. She has written a guide to learning disabilities to be published by Laubach Literacy of Canada in Spring 1990.

This article has been adapted from an article in the Fall 1989 issue of ALERT, the newsletter of The Quebec Literacy Working Group.

Multiple Messages in Writing Placement Practice

Fran Davis

When we think of doing writing placement testing in the CEGEP*, most of us think of a one-time sorting out of already-admitted students into already-existing English courses which will best suit their reading and writing needs. What we do not consider often enough, however, is that the particular testing experience we select has far-reaching effects for everyone: for the students, who learn from the test what we consider important for them to know; for the teachers who prepare them for college, who learn from the test that we do not consider their teaching and testing valid; and for us as teachers and designers of curriculum, who imply by using such tests that our courses will increase student ability to perform better on some similar future test experience, which in most cases does not exist. In fact, placement testing, which we normally think of as only a small aspect of our literacy policy, often creates such a web of contradictions that it seriously interferes with educational goals.

With this very important reality in mind, on November 3,1989, about twenty participants gathered at a workshop at Vanier College to discuss Writing Assessment Research and Evaluation Instruments Used at the CEGEP. Guest speaker Allan Patenaude of the Quebec Ministry of Education first presented an overview of the new Language Arts Program which our incoming students in the English sector now experience and explained how these students are evaluated. He made clear that the Program requires much meaningful reading and writing from these students throughout high school, and that the Secondary V exam, which counts for 50% of their final mark and will be compulsory as of 1990, is a very carefully constructed instrument for measuring their abilities.

Tom McKendy of Marianopolis College presented his research which indicates that, over the past ten years, high school leaving marks have become better and better predictors of student success in CEGEP English courses, and are in fact better predictors than all the placement tests now in use in the anglophone CEGEPs.

Peter Evans of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education led a discussion of how this information could be used to deal with participants' concerns about placement, preparation, college programs, and general ability levels of our present student population. During the discussion, a very telling critique of existing placement practices emerged.

Clearly the least satisfactory method is the standardized multiple choice test, which limits the information we can obtain to those items decided upon by a statistician, tends to emphasize student weaknesses rather than their strengths, undermines the importance of the act of writing by testing it through the selection of already-written options, and provides us with no indication wherever of how students actually write. Holistically graded writing samples fared better in the discussion, but were faulted for suggesting that good writing can be achieved through a single, or at most, a second draft written quickly and under pressure, that no matter what topics are or are not offered, most students will still be able to demonstrate their real ability levels, and that writing is, in fact, a rather meaningless act which only students do and teachers mark.

Clearly, the ideal method of placement would be to use what students have already written, in meaningful contexts and under realistic conditions, up to the time of their CEGEP entrance. This would involve having high school students submit portfolios of their work to CEGEP English Departments. Learning how to assess such portfolios would require all kinds of agreements with the high schools, checks on student authorship, and so on.

Short of this ideal arrangement, however, it did seem important to begin to consider giving more credence to the high school grades already available to us. This practice would give enormous psychological support to struggling high school English teachers, who are often the secondary teachers requiring the most writing tasks of students and using writing in summative evaluation. As long as CEGEPs virtually ignore high school grades, it is hard for these teachers to convince their students of the importance of what they are doing.

Discussion finally centred around the kinds of recommendations the group would like to make on this particular subject. It was not difficult to arrive at the following list, which participants have now taken back to their various CEGEPs and high schools, in the hope that this very sensitive issue will continue to be openly and meaningfully considered.

* CEGEP is an acronym for collèges de l'enseignement général et professionnel, the Quebec system of two and three-year community and vocational colleges.

Fran Davis teaches English and Womens' Studies at Vanier College in Montreal.

1. Given that the new English Language Arts Program has developed complex and compulsory evaluation methods for the reading and writing skills of graduating high school students, it is recommended that, wherever possible, these marks be taken into account in CEGEP placement.

2. Given that high school teachers are, in the new English Language Arts Program, supervising and marking large bodies of student writing for each student, these teachers should be asked to comment on whether individual students ought to be given further assistance with basic writing skills in their first semester at CEGEP.

3. Given that standardized multiple choice tests in reading and writing do not adequately sort out who should be helped or how they should be helped, their use as placement instruments should be discontinued.

4. Wherever possible, the marks outlined in #1 above and the recommendations outlined in #2 above should be used to exempt graduates of the new English Language Arts program from writing placement tests at CEGEP.

5. Students entering CEGEP from other backgrounds, such as those from French schools, recent immigrants, mature students, etc., should be given a two-task placement test: one piece of writing that is not reading dependent, and one piece of writing that is a response to a simple editorial passage of reading.

6. Since portfolios appear to be an ideal form of writing assessment toward which we may all be working, a small project should be set up between a CEGEP English Department and a specific school population, studying the possibility of using the portfolio for placement.

7. Having a writing sample from all entering students is desirable, however, for a number of reasons. It helps colleges design programs; it helps college teachers discuss assessment practices; it keeps college teachers aware of current trends in the writing abilities of their entering student population. For this reason, some CEGEPs may wish to continue to test all entering students; but if they do so, they should make it clear that this is not an act of distrust with respect to the teachers of the new English Language Arts Program.

8. If CEGEPs are placing high school graduates in writing courses in order that specific skills such as exposition or argumentation be improved, this too ought to be communicated to the high schools.

9. Writing samples from all entering students do not necessarily have to be part of a placement practice. They can be collected in classrooms at the start of a first semester. Scheduling that allows for switching of students into writing assistance courses without total timetable change is therefore desirable for large CEGEP English departments: some block pattern which places courses of various types in the same time table pattern would allow teachers to assign students into the courses they appear to need, should an error in placement occur.

10. Information about high school writing tasks, assessment and student achievement is absolutely essential for the development of appropriate college programs and placement practices.

11. Information about college programs and program needs is absolutely essential for further development and application of high school programs, and for high school teachers and students alike.

Readability and readability formulas

1 Introduction

When people talk about how "readable" a text is, they mean one of several things; how legible, interesting, conceptually difficult, clearly written it is. Nowadays the term "readability" usually refers to the last area - aspects of writing style which relate to ease of understanding.

2 What are readability formulas?

Readability formulas are mathematical equations which attempt to predict the level of difficulty of a text. Most of them involve counting a few simple language features in a small sample of the text and then doing calculations or plotting numbers on a chart. The resulting score corresponds to the "reading age" that someone would probably need in order to understand the text.

3 Features that readability formulas count

There are many aspects of writing style that determine how well a text is understoood. However, most readability formulas rely on only a few language features. These are:

- sentence length, measured in number of words

- word difficulty, measured in
  -number of syllables or letters
  -percentage of words on a list of familiar words.

  Word lists are usually better than word length at predicting vocabulary difficulty, but most lists are based on words familiar to American school children, are out of date, and do not take account of different uses of the same word.

One reason formulas use only these few features is that they are relatively easy to define and count. Another is that they correlate well with different measures of text difficulty (see 5.3). But even though very long sentences and long words may sometimes be difficult, complexity cannot be defined in terms of length alone because:

- not all short words are familiar
  e.g. 'lien', 'ilk'

- short, familiar words can be used to express an unfamiliar concept
  e.g. 'black hole in space', 'trade gap'

- short sentences can be difficult to understand
  e.g. 'To be or not to be; that is the question'

4 Features that readability formulas do not count

Below are some important factors which most formulas do not take into account. This is because such features are very difficult or time-consuming to use. Nevertheless, these features do need to be considered when assessing how difficult a piece of writing is.

Reader factors
- background knowledge
- information needs
- interest level

Content factors
- amount of information included
- complexity and abstractness of ideas
- whether it 'makes sense'

Organizational factors
- logical ordering of ideas
- making relationships between ideas
- layout and design
- use of tables and charts rather than prose for complex information

Grammar
- order, number, and kind of clauses
- familiarity of sentence patterns
- several negatives used together e.g. "not dissimilar"
- confusing use of pronouns e.g. "The manager told his assistant to write to his solicitor."
- ambiguous structures e.g. "Applicants who are visiting immigrants..."
  e.g. "Are you married or female and under 65?"
- leaving out relational words such as 'which', 'of', or 'for' e.g. "additional car tax" could mean "tax for an additional car" or "car tax which is additional."

Vocabulary
- abstract words
- ambiguous words
- jargon and specialist terms
- metaphors and idioms
- obscure references e.g. 'Luddite'

Style
- use of active sentences with human subjects e.g."You must complete this form" vs "Completion of this form is obligatory"
- use of personal references e.g. 'you' and 'we'

5 Problems with formulas

While readability formulas may be quick and simple to use, there are serious problems in their application, validity, and accuracy.

5.1 Counting features

Even simple features like sentences and words can be complicated to count at times. For instance, there are no set rules for dealing with:

- quotations within sentences
- sentences connected by colons and semi-colons
- headings
- lists

There are also different views on how to count the number of words or syllables contained in:

- abbreviations e.g. 'no'., 'etc.'
- acronyms e.g. 'NATO' , 'can't'
- hyphenated words e.g. 'week-end'
- numerals and special symbols e.g. '20'

Also, people with different accents may pronounce a different number of syllables in the same word.

5.2 False predictions

It is important to remember that a readability formula only predicts the level of difficulty and that this prediction is based on very few pieces of information about the text. An "easy" readability score is no guarantee that a text is actually comprehensible, nor does a "difficult" score always mean that it is hard to understand. This is because the features which are not taken into account by formulas may be more important in making a text understandable than the ones which are counted. (In fact, a passage with all its words and sentences scrambled would receive the same readability score as the original passage!) Also, formulas work on the assumption that the same things cause difficulty for all readers.

5.3 Validity

When formulas are developed, they are usually based on passages of "known" levels of difficulty. The level of difficulty of a passage is usually determined by giving one of the following tests to school children of various ages:

- a multiple choice test based on the passage
- a 'Cloze' test, in which words are deleted at regular intervals (such as every fifth word), and the subject has to put the exact words back in.

However, it is not clear that such tests actually measure how easy a passage is to understand. They may say more about how difficult the questions are or how intelligent the test-taker is. Also, these tests are not comparable to adult reading situations.

5.4 Reading age

"Reading age" refers to the reading ability of an average person of that age in full-time education. (Some researchers have stated that materials aimed at the general public should demand a reading age of only 11-14). One problem with the concept of reading age is that it takes no account of the reader's knowledge of the world. But a child, an adult, and an immigrant with the same reading age may not understand the same things from a particular piece of writing. Another problem involves what we mean by being able to understand a text: most formulas are based on the average reading level at which subjects could answer 50% or 75% of the test items correctly. This is a much lower level of understanding than adults would need when reading independently.

5.5 Accuracy and comparability

Most formulas claim to be accurate only to within one reading age and only for 60 - 85% of the time. Different formulas often do not agree with each other on the reading level for the same text, and they may differ in their prediction by up to four levels.

8 Alternatives to readability formulas

The best way to judge the readability of a piece of writing is to try it out on some of the people it is intended for. You can ask these readers to underline sentences, phrases or words that they find hard to understand or that they think other people might find hard. You can also ask them for comments on the organization and relevance of the information in the text. If the material is a set of instructions, then the users should be able to carry them out; if it is a reference text, they should be able to find information quickly and easily; if it contains information which they are supposed to understand and remember, they should be able to paraphrase or explain key points. This is more time-consuming than applying readability formulas, but it is also more reliable and can actually pinpoint problems in the text.

Guidelines are available that give specific advice on how to write more clearly. These can also be used to pinpoint problems in an existing piece of writing. However, guidelines should not be followed slavishly - there are exceptions to most general rules. Lists that give alternatives for difficult words are helpful, but sentence structure and overall organization must still be considered. Writing based on guidelines still needs to be tested.

Condensed and reprinted with permission from the Forms Information Centre, Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading, England.

"Stanley and Iris" and Reality

continued from page 1

And that leads to precisely the question that all of us must ask this year. If literacy is not a glamorous enough issue to attract attention without a Hollywood treatment, we had better beware of the unrealistic expectations that are aroused by romanticized presentations. Will funders of programs expect learners to leap within two years from elementary level skills to white-collar affluence?

The reality is that an average learner can move up one grade level with one hundred hours of instructions. The reality is that more learners give up than stay with instruction long enough to make a measurable improvement. The reality is that perhaps one in ten adults with serious reading and writing deficiencies seeks help in the first place. The reality is that the highest level of literacy instruction in a basic program might not equip a learner to take on advanced technical courses.

Only last week, a learner called our Resource Centre asking for help. A nursing aide who has completed the highest level of literacy class available, she explained, "But I still can't write English. I'm very good at my job and they keep offering me promotions. But I terrified they'll find out I can't write, so I keep refusing. Can you tell me where I can learn to writewell enough so I can take a promotion?"

If during 1990, educators cannot convince the public and the politicians that *higher order literacy* is essential for the well-being of a democratic, technological society and that a permanent commitment is required to ensure and sustain that condition, we will have missed our chance.

International Year of the Handicapped aroused public awareness of the needs of the physically disabled. Today, although the handicapped still suffer severe social constraints, I have blind students, hearing-impaired students, and wheel-chair confined students in my class, and my institution has a permanent support service in place.

What will be in place five years from now for adults with literacy problems? for adolescents with reading problems? for displaced workers with inadequate skills for new types of work?

Literacy work begins in the early years. Homes are primary places of learning. Schools play a major role in helping learners develop higher level skills. Studies have indicated that most students who are likely to drop out of high school have already fallen significantly behind in their reading and writing skills by the end of their elementary years. The one third of high school students who are annually dropping out will be the unskilled adults of tomorrow. The workplace has to provide resources to keep upgrading the skills of workers.

"Stanley and Iris" may pique some short-term public interest, but real teachers, tutors, and learners are going to have to sustain that interest and turn it into permanent support for initiatives that do not always yield immediate dramatic outcomes, but do pay long-term dividends.

This issue of the Bulletin presents some of the many ways of looking at literacy, from a school-based project (In the Classroom) to the treatment of learning disabilities in adults. As always, we argue that literacy must be viewed in the broadest, most integrated way possible if actual levels of literacy are to rise in this country.

L.S.

Resources

The following books and materials are available and may be borrowed from The Centre for Literacy. In the past, we have listed resources regularly and will continue the practice as we expand the collection. The lists are not complete. They simply provide an indication of the range of materials. Books may be borrowed through inter-library loan at your institution or by calling the Centre at 514-931-8731. Documents can be consulted in the Centre from Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.. If you cannot get in during those hours, special arrangements can be made to leave documents at the Reference desk in the Dawson College Library, 3040 Sherbrooke Street West, 5th floor. For information, please call Deborah Adler at the number above, local 1415.

***Books**

Bizzell, Patricia, and Bruce Herzberg, *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing*, (St. Martin's Press Inc, Boston), 1987.

Carneval, Anthony P. and Harold Goldstein, *Employee Training: Its Changing Role and Analysis of New Data*, (ASTD Press, Washington DC), 1983.

Ciliberti, Barrie S., Richard L. Venezky and Daniel A. Wagner, editors, *Toward Defining Literacy*, (International Reading Association Inc, Newark), 1990.

Kaestke, Carl F.; Andrew M. Sum, and Richard L. Venesky, *The Subtle Danger- Reflections on the Literacy Abilites of America's Young Adults*, (ETS, New Jersey), 1987.

Koschnick, Kay, and Robert S. Laubach, *Using Readability-Formulas for Easy Adult Materials*, (New Readers Press, New York), 1977.

Pope, Lillie, *Guidelines to Teaching Remedial Reading* -revised, (Book-Lab, New Jersey), 1975.

Sticht, Thomas, William B. Armstrong, Daniel T. Hickey, and John S. Catlor, *Cast-off Youth, Policy and Training Methods from the Military Experience*, (Praeger, New York) 1987.

***Handbooks/Materials**

Laubach Literacy Action- U.S. Program of Laubach Literacy International(New Readers), 1988.
- Literacy Trainer Handbook
- ESOL Trainer Handbook
- Laubach Way to English Trainer Guide

Teaching materials from RECLAIM, Montreal

*** Reports/Briefs**

- The National Assessment of Educational Progress reports on reading, writing, mathematics, and science, 1988.

- Topic sheets on document design, The University of Reading, U.K.

- Briefs from the National Center on Education and Employment e.g. •"Do We Know What Employers Want in Entry-Level Workers?" •"The Impact of New Technology on Skills and Skill Formation in the Banking and Textile Industries"

- Papers from The Southern Growth Policies Board e.g. •"Adult Functional Literacy in the South: Program Responses and a Proposal for a Regional Approach" •"Learning While Earning: Worksite Literacy Programs"

CONFERENCES

Springboards 1990
"Faces of Literacy"
Montreal Convention Centre
April 19 - 20, 1990

The 8th April Conference at Simon's Rock of Bard College
"Language and Symbol: Learning Mathematics and Science"
Friday, April 20,1990
Bard College Center
Great Barrington MA

National Conference
"Time to Read, Time to Write"
April 26 - 28, 1990
Sponsored by One Voice- The Canadian Seniors Network
Ottawa, Ontario

The New Literacy: Media Education in the 1990's
May 10-12, 1990
The University of Guelph
Guelph, Ontario

National Conference on Adult Education
"Challenge for Change '90"
May 9-12, 1990
Algonquin College
Ottawa, Ontario

The Canadian Council of Teachers of English
"Toward 2000: A Venture into Literacy"
May 9- 12, 1990
Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia

16 CONFERENCES

Inkshed VII
Marginalia and Other Rhetorics
May 12 - 14, 1990
Halifax, N.S.

Association of Canadian Community Colleges
Rendezvous '90
Holland College
Charlottetown, P.E.I.
May 28 - 30,1990

National Project on Computers and College Writing Conference
June 1- 3, 1990
Vista Hotel
New York, NY

The Gulf Coast Conference on the Teaching of Writing
June 5 - 8, 1990
The Grand Hotel,
Point Clear, Alabama
Speakers and Interactive Workshops:
Lil Brannon, Kenneth S. Goodman and Shirley Brice Heath.

The Sixth Annual International Conference
"Visions of Higher Education Transnational Dialogue"
August 6 - 10, 1990
Antalya, Turkey

The Fifth International Conference on the Teaching of English
Auckland College of Education
Auckland, New Zealand
August 24 - 28, 1990

NTNW conference on Language and Literacy Assessment
Call for proposals deadline March 31
New York, New York
November 9 -11, 1990

McGill Writing Seminars

Writing the Social Subject: A Critique of Descriptive Method
Nancy Jackson (McGill University)
Thursday, March 15, 1990

Writing in the Secondary Schools of Quebec: Different Voices
Gayle Goodman (M.E.Q.)
Wednesday, March 21, 1990

A Feminist Perspective on Writing
Fran Davis (Vanier College)
Thursday, March 29, 1990
Learning to Publish, Publish to Learn
David Dillon (McGill University)
Wednesday, April 4, 1990

Details of these conferences available at Literacy Centre, Tel.(514) 931-8731, ext. 1412.

Literacy Across the Curriculum Workshop
Developing Reading Guides to Help Students in all Disciplines
Leader: Harvey S. Wiener
City University of New York
May 25 -26,1990
N.B. This workshop was rescheduled from January 9 -10, 1990

Announcing
Literacy in the Colleges: A Summer Institute
June 26 -July 20, 1990
Dawson College
Montreal, Quebec
For brochures and registration information, call The Centre for Literacy, Tel.(514) 931-8731, ext. 1412, or write to the address listed on the back page.

Literacy Across the Curriculum is published five times during the academic year by The QAAL/Dawson College Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community.

Single subscription	$ 7.50
Multiple subscription (10)	$30.00
Multiple subscription (20)	$54.00

To subscribe, complete this form and mail it with your cheque to:

The Centre for Literacy
Dawson College
3040 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3Z 1A4

I enclose a cheque for: $ 7.50
$30.00
$54.00

Make cheques payable to The Centre for Literacy.
On multiple orders outside Montreal, please add $3.00 additional postage.

Name: ______________________________
Institution: ______________________________
Address: ______________________________
____

A Special Issue Devoted to Workplace Literacy

September 1990,Vol. 6 No. 3

Literacy across the curriculum

Language for Learning

Workplace/ Employable Literacy and Functional/ School Literacy

Throughout 1990, International Literacy Year, public attention is being focused on literacy. Headlines scream about economic losses to industry, about workplace accidents, about tasks having to be redone several times over, at a cost of billions to Canadian business. All of this because so many workers are functionally "illiterate." To assess the accuracy of these allegations, it is necessary to distinguish between school/functional literacy and workplace/employable literacy. It is also a good time to examine some mindless simplifications and explode some pervasive myths.

Myth 1: Illiteracy is increasing worldwide, including North America.
Clarification: The absolute number of those unable to read and write is increasing because of Third World population growth and the lack of universal access to education in those countries. In the West, levels of literacy have never been as high as they are today.

Myth 2: Because schools in the western world have failed, young graduates are less literate than earlier generations were.
Clarification: Schools have never in history educated the numbers that have passed through North American institutions since World War II. Recent surveys confirm that levels of literacy are directly proportional to years of schooling and that the lowest levels of literacy exist among the older segments of the population.

Literacy and Schooling
The most up-to-date confirmation of the connection between literacy and schooling is provided by The Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities, carried out by Statistics Canada in 1989 and being released in segments since June of this year [see p 6]. The Survey employed direct measures (i.e. asked respondents to perform real tasks) to elicit the most detailed information ever gathered on the reading, writing, and numeracy skill levels of Canadians.

For the purpose of the survey, functional literacy was defined as the information processing skills necessary to use the *printed material* commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community.

Contrary to popular belief and media hype, the survey indicates that high school completion is the key to everyday reading skills and that functional numeracy skills are closely associated with functional reading skills. Only 8% of Canadians who completed high school are at the lowest levels of reading, while 70% have skills that permit them to meet daily demands. Few Canadians with post-secondary training have low levels of proficiency. As to those "illiterate" youth who regularly attract the wrath of language usage czars like Safire, Simon and Bruce, only 6% of those aged 16-24 function at the lowest levels of reading compared to 14% of those aged 35-54 and 36% of those aged 55-69! In this last group, 53% have numeracy skills inadequate to carry out daily requirements.

As shocking as they may seem, these statistics suggest that we are in fact improving in terms of literacy. But we have still not answered the question. Do we have a literacy crisis in the Canadian workplace? The answer is

continued on page 2

INSIDE

4 **In The Classroom**
• School Literacy Policies: What Do They Look Like?
• Is Your Organization Ready For A Literacy Training Program?
6 Canadian Literacy Skills Are Surveyed
9 **To Ponder**
11 **Resources**
13 **Announcements**
14 **Conferences**

continued from page 1

that while we do not have a crisis, we do have a problem, because even if sixty-two percent of all Canadians have reading and numeracy skills sufficient to meet most everyday demands, it leaves 38% who do not. That is an excessively large number in a country that is so dependent upon printed and visual information systems.

Some critics argue that a majority of North Americans today get their information via television. However, evidence is growing that there is just as strong a correlation between reading skills and the ability to process and use television information as there is between reading and numeracy. A study commissioned by The Canadian Cancer Association to determine the impact on a Newfoundland audience of television commercials about the link between smoking and cancer found that the level of understanding in that community was directly related to their level of literacy.

Functional Literacy and Workplace Literacy Not Synonymous.

Most important, there is a distinction between functional literacy, or the ability to read and write well enough to meet ordinary daily demands, and workplace literacy which involves the ability to perform reading and writing tasks on the job. The reality of the Canadian workplace today is one of change, change which is increasing the demand for literacy beyond what is required for everyday living.

If the StatsCan survey is accurate, then some of the gravest deficiencies lie with middle-aged employees who have been on the job for years. [See Box 1, p. 3] Chances are that the bank manager who wrote the error-ridden letter that infuriated the client is a very competent banker with strong interpersonal skills and good oral communication. Chances are that until recently, he was not asked to write his own correspondence; he simply dictated to a secretary. His flawed writing is a symptom of one kind of change: he now has a personal computer on his desk and is expected to take care of correspondence between himself and clients. These changes are showing up in the banking and engineering fields, among others.

Nor is there any longer a pool of highly literate secretaries. Only a generation ago, when women had few career choices, secretary ranked only behind teacher and nurse as desirable options for the very capable. In the nineties, when the brightest women have unlimited choices, too few opt for a secretarial program (even when it is called "Office Systems Technology"). A lawyer friend of mine in Toronto last year went six months without a secretary because he could not find a competent candidate. He was offering $40,000/year.

The basic skills that employers indicate they want at entry level have been characterized by Anthony Carnevale, President of The American Society for Training and Development; besides reading, writing, and computation, which form the foundation of the skills necessary for workplace competency, he includes communication, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, the ability to learn, and leadership.

Employers cannot afford to keep passing over underskilled workers at entry level or look for more competent replacements at mid-level. Our own Canadian survey confirms Carnevale's assertion that they do not exist. With the demographic patterns for the decade in mind, he cautions employers that 75% of those now in the workforce will still be there in the year 2000.

Canadian Business Weak on Workplace Training

While schooling seems to be the single most significant factor in determining levels of literacy, more than 30% of Canadian young people are leaving high school without their secondary certificate. They will join the ranks of the underskilled, most of whom will not have an employable level of literacy.

If employers need more literate workers, they will have to look at new forms of training which integrate literacy and technical training on the job and which grow from school-business partnerships [See Box 2, p. 3]. Researchers Maurice Taylor and Glenda Lewe from Algonquin College have developed a workable model for this type of integrated program, but Canadian industry has not been ready for this approach to training.

Canadian investment in education on the job is one of the lowest in the industrialized world. The last published figures showed that Canadian business spent $1.50 for every $80.00 spent by their American counterparts. Perhaps the slowness to respond arises from the irony that there is as much of a welfare mentality in the Canadian business community as that community has always decried in the larger society. There is an unwritten expectation that government should pay the bill for education, or that it is

continued on page 3

Literacy Across the Curriculum

3040 Sherbrooke Street West
Room 4B 1.9
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H3Z 1A4

Editor
Linda Shohet
Layout
The Weekly Herald
Design Concept
Janice Bernath

The Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community

continued from page 2

the responsibility of the individual.

In Quebec, employers have been especially slow to pick up on this issue. At a Montreal forum of business, union, education, and community-based literacy groups this past April, business participants acknowledged that drugs and alcoholism were much higher on their agendas than education and literacy and that there is a need for greater awareness of just what is at stake.

There are, however, a few local workplace experiments underway; the results are not yet in, but the efforts are worth recognizing. [See Box 3] In the case of basic skills and literacy, unless business comes to see upgrading for new demands as an investment in its own future and the future of those they already employ, many industries are going to disappear over the next decade for lack of qualified personnel.

Change Required in Schools and Workplace

Schools are also going to have to shift from being fragmented, fact-retrieval systems to being systems of thoughtful integrated learning from which nobody graduates without a base of employable skills. A tall order, but one to which schools will have to aspire. Until now our schools have been highly successful in accommodating huge numbers of learners and making most of them functionally literate. The challenge now is to increase the number who complete their schooling and raise the ante; the challenge now is to make graduates employably literate. Integrated training in the workplace is the counterpart to literacy across the curriculum in the schools. [See *In the Classroom*, p. 5].

BOX 1

The Banking Industry - A Local Anecdote

A local bank manager with one of our major chartered banks answered a customer's complaint in a two-page letter riddled with errors in grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. The customer, a businessman of some stature, was so incensed by the quality of the communication that he circled all the errors and sent a copy to the Vice-President, Human Resources, with his own letter saying that if the enclosed example was typical of managers in branches of this bank, then he had better rethink his commitment to this institution. The Vice-President copied both letters and sent them back to the branch manager with a memo ordering him to "Do something about this immediately!" Without being explicit, the Vice-President was implying that the manager should take some French writing courses. The manager, however, understood that he should apologize to the customer; so he wrote another letter that had more errors than the first and that ended up once again on the Vice-President's desk. The story surfaced in a discussion on whether Canadian banks have a workplace literacy problem.

BOX 2

The Banking Industry - An American Response

The American Institute of Banking in 1988 did an extensive study of banks across the United States to discover that there is a serious problem of basic skills among entry-level employees. They defined basic skills as "prerequisite skills in reading, writing, oral communication, math, or general problem-solving that are required for an acceptable level of functioning for a specific job." At the level of teller, it was found that more than twenty candidates were interviewed and tested to fill one job. Oral and written communications were the two most frequently cited problem areas, and the positions with the greatest number of basic-skills deficiencies were those of teller, customer service representative, and secretary. The banking industry has responded by commissioning workplace literacy experts Larry Mikulecky and Jorie Philippi to develop a banking-specific basic skills curriculum, the first such industry-wide, industry-specific program in the United States.

BOX 3

Workplace Literacy - A Local Example

A unique example of a workplace literacy project is being undertaken this fall in Montreal at Boulangeries Weston. When the company began construction on a new technically advanced plant, they decided that they wanted to take as many of their employees with them as possible. The average age was forty-three, the average number of years of seniority, fifteen. The union knew that 2.9% of the floor workers were almost totally illiterate, but that there was likely a much larger number with little schooling who could not be retrained for technical jobs without preliminary basic skills. Through cooperation between union and management, and after overcoming an expected amount of uneasiness about factory-wide testing, the company contracted a computer-assisted learning company and a local school board to develop individualized programs in reading, writing, and math for employees who needed them and wanted to work in the new plant. If successful, this program could become a model for other local industries

School Literacy Policies What Do they Look Like?

One of the cornerstones of any institutional Literacy Across the Curriculum program is that literacy is not a set of discrete skills that can be drilled in isolation. It is inseparable from the thinking abilities that underlie learning in every subject-area, and therefore all teachers share responsibility for the literacy of their students.

This type of statement has little meaning in itself if not supported by teaching practice and translated into expectations that students know and understand.

Four years ago, Dawson College published a statement in the calendar announcing an institutional commitment to improving literacy. Since then, the college has been holding discussions, workshops, and Senate (Academic Council) debates on just what department and course literacy policies would actually look like. A decision was passed in June 1989 that every department would be asked to develop its own policy in keeping with a set of general guidelines provided by a faculty LAC committee.

The key was that each department was to focus on the needs and expectations of its own discipline or program and that students should be able to communicate verbally and in writing their understanding and ability to carry out the requirements of the discipline.

The deadline for submission of department policies was June 1990; by September 1990, every course outline should have a statement of the department and/or teacher's literacy requirements and the way in which it will be integrated into course evaluation.

The examples given here were developed in two departments that have not in the past explicitly identified literacy as a concern.

Radiological Technology
This three-year program trains X-ray technicians for labs and hospitals. Their department literacy policy, incorporated into a manual of policies, reads:

Since one of the objectives of Dawson College is the attainment of a basic level of literacy in each student who graduates from the College, this department would undertake the following steps to achieve this end.

Each specialty course will include a mark for academic content and one for literacy. Literacy here means a demonstration of an acceptable level of precision and clarity in verbal, written, or comprehension skills.

The following is suggested:

1.) *Each course will include 5-10% specifically assigned to literacy.*

2.) *This 5-10% will be based on the evaluation of verbal, written or comprehension skills depending on the overall course requirements.*

Val Maynard, a professor in the Radiography Department, has interpreted that guideline as a requirement for her courses on "Image Recording" and "Patient Care" as follows:

Since concise accurate expression is an integral part of science and technology courses, all tests will include evaluation of the students' communication skills. On each test students will be asked to answer one or more questions using complete sentences which demonstrate their ability to present information clearly and concisely.

Mathematics Department
The Math Department is an academic department that teaches a full range of courses from basic to university prep. They have interpreted the literacy policy to reflect a central concern for numeracy as well as for reading and writing:

Problem-solving is an essential component of this course. Students will be expected to analyze problems stated in words, to present their solutions logically and coherently, and to display their answers in a form corresponding to the statement of the problem including appropriate units of measurement. Marks will be deducted for work which is inadequate in these respects, even though the answers may be numerically correct.

Every course outline in the department, according to chairman John Denton, contains a variation of this statement.

Institutional commitment of this kind increases student awareness of the importance of literacy and motivates those students who may need help to seek it from support services inside the college or out. Over time, the insistence on acceptable standards of communication should produce graduates with strong basic skills that serve as a foundation for continued learning in universities or on the job.

Is Your Organization Ready for a Reading Literacy Training Program?

JOB AID: A READING LITERACY READINESS CHECKLIST

Before designing and conducting a reading literacy training program, find out what your organization's needs are and what resources are available.

This procedure will:

- help link program goals and objectives with the organization's overall goals and needs.
- help identify needed resources such as staff, funding, facilities, and other program components, and
- provide a clear understanding of the kind of program that can be offered based on available resources.

Use the following questions as guidelines:

- Will the organization provide full funding?
- What organizational goals are not being accomplished?
- What workplace changes are planned that will affect future goals?
- What skills are needed now and in the future to perform specific jobs?
- How many employees need training?
  Does this number justify establishing a reading literacy program?
- What sections, departments, and organizational levels should be involved in the training?
  In what ways can the training function guide their involvement?
- Will the company offer program support by assigning staff to direct, coordinate, and monitor the program?
  If yes, how many staff are assigned and how will their functions be managed?
- What are some possible outside program resources?
- What is the estimated cost of a reading literacy program?
- What are some possible outside funding sources?
- What on-site location(s) may be available for training?
- Will additional training be needed for company staff to conduct the program?
  If yes, what kind of training is needed?
- Will the organization allow company time for training?
  If yes, how will released time affect productivity and available facilities?
- Do you have full management support for the program?
  If no, what steps need to be taken to win that support?

Reprinted with permission from *INFO-LINE*, Job-Related Literacy Training: Teaching Reading on the Job, Issue 908, August 1989, p.15.

Canadian Literacy Skills are Surveyed

Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities: An Overview

Q. What is the Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities?
A. It is the largest study ever conducted in Canada to directly assess the functional reading, writing and numeracy skills of Canada's adult population. Restricted to Canada's official languages, it was intended to provide more detailed information than the Southam Survey of 1987.

Q. Who carried it out and when?
A. It was conducted in October 1989 by Statistics Canada on behalf of the National Literacy Secretariat.

Q. How large a sample was surveyed?
A. A representative sample of approximately 9,500 persons aged 16 to 69 attempted some or all of the tasks designed to measure their literacy skills. The sample was pre-selected from respondents to the monthly Labour Force Survey. Residents of the Yukon and Northwest Territories, members of the Armed Forces, persons living on Indian reserves and inmates of institutions were not included in the sample. These exclusions account for approximately 3% of the Canadian population.

Q. What definition of literacy was used in the survey?
A. For the purpose of the survey, literacy was defined as the information processing skills necessary to use the **printed material** commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community. From this broad definition, skill levels were defined according to the abilities required to accomplish a variety of activities.

Q. What were survey respondents asked to do?
A. Individuals were interviewed in their homes and asked to perform a series of tasks designed to test reading, writing and numeracy activities commonly encountered in daily life in Canada The survey employed three questionnaires to profile the characteristics and the literacy skills of Canada's adult population:
1.) a "background" questionnaire to gather information on an individual's socio-demographic characteristics, on parental education achievement, as well as perceived literacy skills and needs.
2.) a screening questionnaire, involving a small number of simple tasks, designed to identify individuals with very limited literacy abilities. Those with very low literacy abilities were not asked to respond to the next questionnaire.
3.) the "main" questionnaire aimed at measuring specific reading, writing and numeracy abilities.

Q. How were reading skills categorized?
A. Respondents were categorized into skill levels according to their performance on the test (see tables 1 & 2, p. 8). For the purpose of this report, Canadians at levels 1 and 2 are described as having skills too limited to deal with everyday reading demands. Canadians at level 4 have reading skills sufficient to meet everyday requirements, while those at level 3 have a reading proficiency enabling them to handle reading demands within a more limited range.

Some Highlights of the Survey of Reading Skills:

- The majority (62%) of the Canadian adult population aged 16 to 69 have reading abilities sufficient to deal with most everyday reading requirements (level 4). Their skills are adequate to enable them to acquire further knowledge using written material.

- The reading skills of 16% (2.9 million) of Canada's adults are too limited to allow them to deal with the majority of written material encountered in everyday life. This percentage covers individuals whose abilities are classified at levels 1 (5%) and 2 (9%) and persons who did not attempt the test because they reported having no abilities in English or French (2%).

- Of the 2% (320,000) of Canada's adult population reported as having no skills in either of Canada's official languages, the great majority of them (3 out of 4) are women over 35 years of age and 71% of them live in Ontario.

- A further 22% (4.0 million) of Canadian adults can use reading materials to carry out simple reading tasks within familiar contexts with materials that are clearly laid out (level 3). However, this group does not have sufficient skills to cope with unfamiliar, more complex reading contexts.

Some Highlights of the Survey of Numeracy Skills:

- The majority (62%) of Canada's adult population (aged 16-69) have numeracy skills sufficient to handle the numerical tasks normally encountered in everyday life. These skills enable them to deal with printed material requiring a simple sequence of numerical operations (level 3). Skills at this level are adequate to meet the numeracy requirements of most everyday documents and forms.

- Twenty-four percent (4.2 million) of Canadian adults do not possess the necessary skills to meet most everyday numeracy requirements but can deal with commonly encountered documents and forms requiring them to perform a simple numerical operation such as an addition or subtraction (level 2).

- An additional 14% (2.4 million) of Canadian adults have limited numeracy skills (level 1). These skills enable them to, at most, locate and recognize numbers in isolation or in a short text. Their skills do not permit them to perform numerical operations consistently.

- As with reading skills, numeracy skills are closely linked to the level of schooling (see table 1).

- Almost half (46%) of Canada's adults who reported having either no schooling, or elementary schooling only, had very limited numeracy skills (level 1 abilities which enable them to, at most, locate and recognize numbers.)

- Sixty-four percent of Canadians whose highest level of schooling is secondary school completion were categorized at numeracy level 3 (abilities enabling them to meet most daily requirements). In comparison, only 47% of those who started but did not complete their secondary schooling were classified at that level.

- Eighty-three percent of adult Canadians who attended university were assessed as having skills enabling them to meet most everyday numeracy damands (level 3).

- Functional numeracy skills are closely associated with functional reading skills.

- Only 1 out of 3 Canadians with reading skills at level 3 (those who can use reading material provided it is simple, clearly laid out and the task involved is not too complex) have numeracy skills sufficient to meet most everyday demands (numeracy level 3).

- Highest functional numeracy skills found among respondents 25-34 years of age.

- Fourteen percent of Canada's young adults (16-24) have very limited numeracy abilities (level 1) and a further 30% of them have level 2 skills allowing them to deal with material requiring them to perform a simple numerical operation. Less exposure to everyday printed material by young adults may, in part, explain differences between this age group and the 25-34 year olds.

- Forty-seven percent of Canadians aged 55-69 have numeracy skills sufficient to meet everyday numeracy demands.

A full analysis of the survey data is scheduled for publication in September 1990. For more detailed information or a copy of the full survey results, contact:

Gilles Montigny (613-951-9731) or
Scott Murray (613-951-9476)
Statistics Canada; or
Tom Brecher (613-953-5283),
National Literacy Secretariat

LITERACY MYTH 1

Illiteracy is increasing worldwide, including in North America.

Clarification: The absolute number of those unable to read and write is increasing because of Third World population growth and the lack of universal access to education in those countries. In the West, levels of literacy have never been as high as they are today.

LITERACY MYTH 2

Because schools in the western world have failed, young graduates are less literate than earlier generations were.

Clarification: Schools have never in history educated the numbers that have passed through North American institutions since World War II. Recent surveys confirm that levels of literacy are directly proportional to years of schooling and that the lowest levels of literacy exist among the older segments of the population.

Table 1 Percentage distribution of Canadian adults aged 16-69 by highest level of schooling showing reading skill level, Canada.
(**Note**: Excludes persons who reported having no skills in either of Canada's official languages.)

	Population		Reading Skills		
	(thousands)	**Level 1**	**Level 2**	**Level 3**	**Level 4**
Canada*	**17,705**	**5%**	**10%**	**22%**	**63%**
No schooling or elementary	1,818	27%	33%	28%	12% (Q)
Some secondary	4,427	3% (Q)	13%	35%	48%
Secondary completed	4,181	(1)	6% (Q)	22%	70%
Trade School	1,133	(1)	(1)	25% (Q)	63%
Community College	2,458	(1)	(1)	15% (Q)	81%
Unversity	3,456	(1)	(1)	8% (Q)	89%

Table 2 Percentage distribution of Canadian adults aged 16-69 by age group showing reading skill level, Canada.
(**Note**: Excludes persons who reported having no skills in either of Canada's official languages.)

	Population		Reading Skills		
	(thousands)	**Level 1**	**Level 2**	**Level 3**	**Level 4**
Canada	**17,705**	**55%**	**10%**	**22%**	**63%**
16-24 years	3,469	1% (Q)	5%	23%	71%
25-34 years	4,554	2% (Q)	5%	17%	76%
35-54 years	6,484	4%	10%	23%	63%
55-69 years	3,198	15%	21%	29%	36%

* Total includes those who did not state level of schooling.
(1) The sampling variability associated with this estimate is too high for the estimate to be released.
(Q) Users are cautioned that the sampling variability associated with this estimate is high.

***Source**: Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities, Statistics Canada, 1989.*

Level 1- Canadians at this level have the most difficulty dealing with printed materials. They most likely identify themselves as people who cannot read;

Level 2- Canadians at this level can use printed materials only for limited purposes such as finding a familiar word in a simple text. They would likely recognize themselves as having difficulties with common reading materials;

Level 3- Canadians at this level can use reading materials in a variety of situations provided the material is simple, clearly laid out and the tasks involved are not too complex. While these people generally do not see themselves as having major reading difficulties, they tend to avoid situations requiring reading;

Level 4- Canadians at this level meet most everyday reading demands. This is a large and diverse group which exhibits a wide range of reading skills.

TO PONDER 9

1 On literacy and new technologies

One of [Mary Renault]'s books is called *The Praise Singer*, and the hero is a storyteller in ancient Greece and one of his jobs... is to sing the praises of the sponsor of a Greek festival... He earned his keep by going around and telling stories, and one day his tutor, his mentor, his master, found him writing down things on his wax tablet, found him making notes, and the tutor grabbed his stylus, broke it, threw it across the room, and said "Writing rots the memory." He didn't say "Well, that's a wonderful piece of technology and I'm glad to see you're using it because it's going to save us an immense amount of time, it's going to make our job much easier, it's going to allow us to collect far more stories than we can collect by simply memorizing them." He said "Writing rots the memory". He was angry for a couple of reasons. One is that technology, in this case the stylus and wax, interferes with the culture that has been established. Secondly, it undermines the social and the powerful structures. If you are a storyteller in ancient Greece, you tell your stories by sitting with all the people around you. You are the focus of attention and it's a community event. You're the only one who really knows the stories and the audience is just there to make sure you get it right. When you write for people there is no need for a community; in fact you're writing for people who may never see you. And you are communicating ideas, and it becomes, instead of a community activity, an individual activity. In the process, it wipes out the storyteller and it replaces the storyteller by the writer.

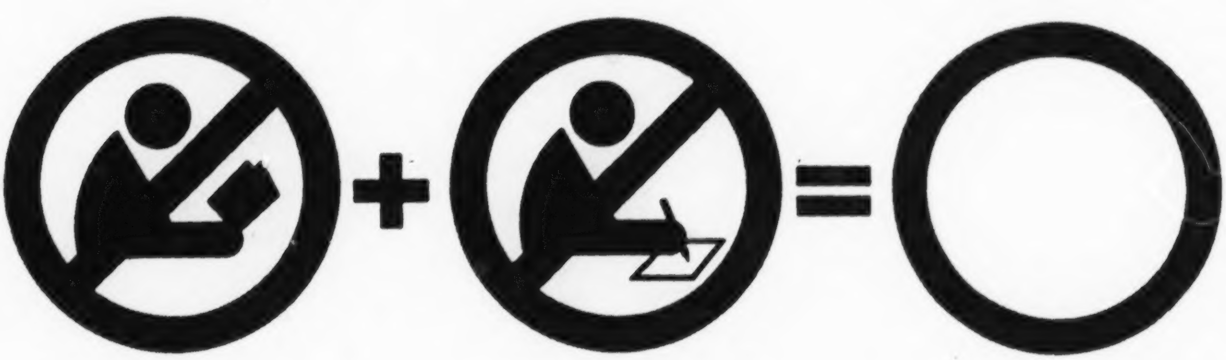
Jeffrey Holmes, "Creating a Literate Environment," address to the Canadian Home and School Association conference on Literacy in the Information Age, November 16, 1989.

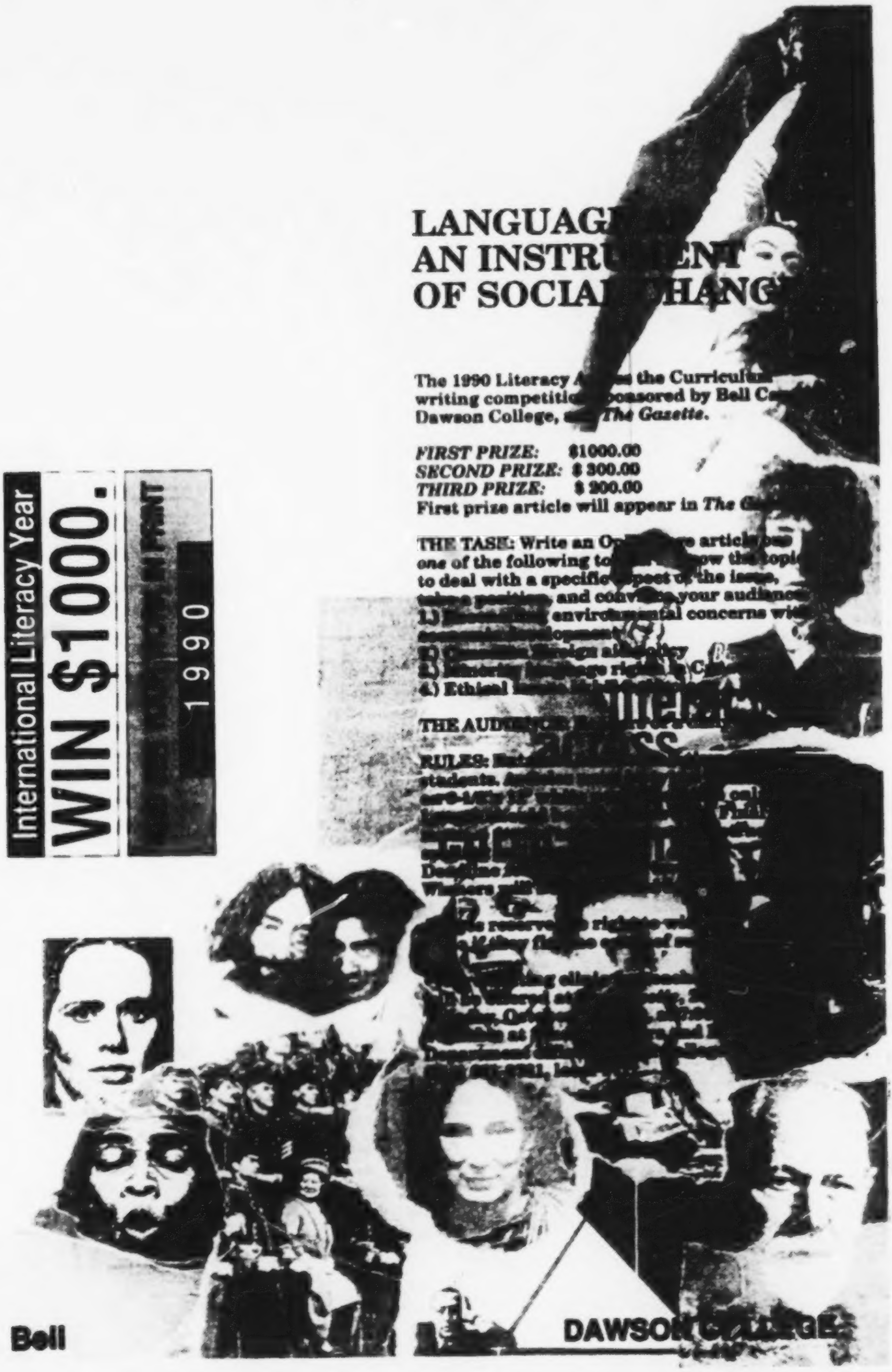
2 On a visual representation of illiteracy.

This 36 x 24" poster, designed by Mr. Lawrence McGarvey of the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, won first prize in the annual Herb Lubalin International Student Design Competition sponsored by the International Typeface Corporation.

Prepared as a reflective street sign, the message relayed by this poster is understandable by those who can read and those who cannot.

Reprinted with permission of the International Typeface Corporation.





LANGUAG[illegible]
AN INSTRU[illegible]ENT
OF SOCIA[illegible]HANG[illegible]

The 1990 Literacy A[illegible] the Curriculu[illegible]
writing competiti[illegible]ponsored by Bell C[illegible]
Dawson College, [illegible] *The Gazette*.

FIRST PRIZE: $1000.00
SECOND PRIZE: $ 300.00
THIRD PRIZE: $ 200.00
First prize article will appear in *The G*[illegible]

THE TASK: Write an O[illegible]e articl[illegible]
one of the following to[illegible]ow the topi[illegible]
to deal with a specific [illegible] of the issue,
[illegible] and conv[illegible] your audienc[illegible]
1.) [illegible] environmental concerns wi[illegible]
[illegible]
2.) [illegible]
3.) [illegible] rights [illegible]
4.) Ethical [illegible]

THE AUDI[illegible]

RULES: [illegible]

International Literacy Year
WIN $1000.
IN PRINT
1990
Bell
DAWSON COLLEGE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The resources in The Centre have now been catalogued and may be borrowed through inter-library loan at your institution or by calling the Centre at 514-931-8731. Documents can be consulted from Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.. If you cannot get in during those hours, special arrangements can be made to leave documents at the Reference Desk in the Dawson College Library. Copies of the entire catalogue may be requested for $6.00, or printouts by specific subject headings can be ordered at cost. For information, please call Catherine Duncan at the number above, local 1415.
The selection below is a small sample of the range of materials available, with emphasis on the workplace issues highlighted in this volume.

Books

Askov, Eunice N., Sheila M. Sherow. (1989). *Workplace Technical Assistance Program (WorkTAP).* Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Penn State University.

Auspos, Patricia et al. (1989). *Implementing Jobstart: A Demonstration for School Dropouts in the JPTA System.* New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

Carnevale, Anthony P., Leila J. Gainer, Ann S. Meltzer. (1989). *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want.* Alexandria VA: American Society for Training & Development.

Documents

American Council of Life Insurance. (1983). "Functional Literacy and the Workplace." Washington, DC: American Council of Life Insurance.

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. "Union-Sponsored Programs to Improve Adult Literacy." Washington, DC: AFL-CIO.

Bailey, Thomas. (1989). "Changes in the Nature and Structure of Work: Implications for Employer-Sponsored Training." New York: Institute on Education and the Economy.

Bailey, Thomas, Thierry Noyelle. (1988). "New Technology and Skill Formation: Issues and Hypotheses."Technical Paper No.1, New York: National Center on Education and Employment.

Bartel, Ann P. (1989). "Utilizing Corporate Survey Data to Study Investments in Employee Training and Development." New York: Institute on Education and the Economy.

Berryman, Sue E. (1987). "Breaking out of the Circle: Rethinking Our Assumptions About Education and the Economy." Occasional Paper No. 2. New York: National Center on Education and Employment.

Berryman, Sue E. (1988). "Education and the Economy: What Should We Teach? When? To Whom? " Occasional Paper No. 4. New York: National Center on Education and Employment.

Bird-McCord, Alice. (1983). "The Impact of Basic Skills on Human Resource Management in the Retailing Industry." New York: National Retail Merchants Association.

Canada. Emploi et Immigration Canada. (1978). "Habilités Génériques: Clés du Rendement Professionnel." Ottawa: Emploi et Immigration Canada.

Canada. Employment and Immigration Canada. (1985)."Canadian Jobs Strategy." Ottawa: Employment and Immigration Canada.

Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy. (1988). "Measuring the Costs of Illiteracy in Canada." Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy.

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. (1989). "Literacy and the Right to Know: A Workshop." Hamilton, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.

Charner, Ivan, Shirley Fox. (1989). "Improving Workplace Literacy Through Community Collaboration: Leader's Guide." Maryland: Academy for Educational Development.

Collino, Gladys E., Elizabeth Aderman, Eunice N. Askov. "Literacy and Job Peformance: A Perspective." Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Penn State University.

Commonwealth Literacy Campaign. (1989). "Massachusetts Workforce Literacy Plan."

Educational Testing Service. "Workplace Literacy." Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Fédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses du Québec. (1989). "Déclaration de politique sur la formation professionelle." Montréal, Québec: FTQ.

Felton, Mimi Edge. (1981). "Handbook for Trade Related Curriculum Development in a Cooperative Adult Basic Education Program in Industry." Suffolk, VA: Planter Peanuts.

Fox, Mike. (1986). "A Look at Illiteracy in America Today - The Problem, The Solutions, The Alternatives." Washington, DC: Push Literacy Action Now.

Frontier College. (1989). "Learning in the Workplace." Toronto: Frontier College.

Harman, David. (1985). "Turning Illiteracy Around: An Agenda for National Action." Working Paper No. 2. New York: Business Council for Effective Literacy.

Harvey, Michael D. (1987). "Language and Literacy Problems in Alberta's Labour Force." Alberta: Research & Statistics Unit.

Hospital Employees' Union. (1989). "Basic Skills Upgrading Program." New Westminster, BC: Hospital Employees' Union, Royal Columbian Hospital, Douglas College.

12 RESOURCES

Hull, William L., Judith A. Sechler. (1987). "Adult Literacy: Skills for the American Work Force." Columbus, OH: National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

Illinois. Secretary of State Literacy Office. (1988). "Toward a More Literate Workforce: The Emergence of Workplace Literacy Programs in Illinois." Illinois: Secretary of State.

Jury Consultatif National sur le Congé de Perfectionnement. (1984). "Apprendre: Un Défi Pour la Vie. Proposition Pour Combler le Fossé Entre le Travail et la Formation." Ottawa: Emploi et Immigration Canada.

Krusemark, Dawn M. (1990). "Workplace Literacy." New York: American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

Laubach Literacy of Canada. (1989). *A Guide to Setting Up Literacy Programs in the Workplace*. Saint John, NB: Laubach Literacy of Canada.

Lopez-Valadez, Jeanne. (Ed.). (1985). "Immigrant Workers and the American Workplace: The Role of Voc Ed." Information Series No. 32. Columbus, OH: National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

Martin, D'Arcy. (1989). "A Worker-Driven Agenda for Training." Toronto, Ontario: Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada.

Mendel, Richard A. (1988)." Meeting the Economic Challenge of the 1990's: Workforce Literacy in the South." Washington, DC: Sunbelt Institute.

Mikulecky, Larry, Jeanne Ehlinger, Avis L. Meenan. (1987). "Training for Job Literacy Demands: What Research Applies to Practice." Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Penn State University.

National Association of Broadcasters. *Literacy in the Workplace: Attitudes Associated with Retraining*. Washington, DC: National Association of Broadcasters.

Natriello, Gary. (1989). *What Do Employers Want in Entry-Level Workers? An Assessment of the Evidence*. Occasional Paper No. 7. New York: National Center on Education and Employment.

Nickerson, Raymond S. (1985). *Adult Literacy and Technology*. Technical Report No. 351. Champaign, IL: Center for the Study of Reading.

Omega Group. (1989). *Literacy in the Workplace: The Executive Perspective*. Haverford, PA: Omega Group.

Ontario Federation of Labor. (1989). *Education and Training*. Ontario: 33rd Annual Convention.

Payne-Butler, Erik, Andrew Hahn, James Darr. (1985). *The Literacy-Employment Equation: Education for Tomorrow's Jobs* - A Policy Options Monograph. San Fransisco, CA: Far West Laboratory.

Rush, Timothy, Alden J. Moe, Rebecca L. Storlie. (1986). *Occupational Literacy Education*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Sticht, Thomas G., Larry Mikulecky. (1984). *Job-Related Basic Skills: Cases and Conclusions*. Alexandria, VA: NO. ED Document Reproduction Service No. ED 246 312.

Taylor, Maurice C., Glenda R. Lewe. (1990). *Basic Skills Training - A Launchpad for Success in the Workplace*. Ontario: Algonquin College.

Work in America Institute. *Linking Home and School Through the Workplace*. Scarsdale, NY: Work in America Institute.

Audio-visual materials

Illinois. Secretary of State Literacy Office. "On the Job: Workplace Literacy." Springfield, IL: Illinois secretary of State Literacy Office. (VHS 20 min.)

PDR Productions. (1990). *ABC Workforce 2000* PSA's. New York: PDR Productions. (VHS 8 min.)

PDR PRoductions. *What is Workforce Literacy?* New York: PDR Productions. (VHS 8 min.)

Penn State University. (1990). *Literacy in the Workplace*. Pennsylvania: Penn State University. (VHS 14 min.)

Literacy Across the Curriculum 1990-91 Workshops

All workshops take place at Dawson College, 3040 Sherbrooke Street W., from 9:00 - 4:00.

1. **Computers and Composition: What Teachers Need to Know**
   Leader: Deborah Holdstein, Governor's State University, Chicago
   Date: Friday, November 2, 1990

Are computers in the writing classroom a fad, a frill, or can they genuinely improve the teaching of writing in ways that ordinary teaching methods cannot? Are they merely tools, like typewriters, or modes of learning that necessitate new ways of thinking? Can teachers trained in traditional programs of study understand and use computers to reorganize classrooms and give students new ways of controlling text and interacting with readers?

2. **Developing Guides Across the Disciplines to Help Students Read More Effectively**
   Leader: Harvey S. Wiener, City University of New York
   Dates: Thursday and Friday, January 10, 11, 1991
3. **Organizing a Collaborative Classroom: A Workshop**
   Leader: Jim Reither, St. Thomas University, Fredericton, N.B.
   Date: Friday, February 8, 1991
4. **Science Writing and School Writing**
   Leader: Charles Bazerman, Georgia Institute of Technology
   Date: Friday, March 8, 1990
5. **Teaching Critical Thinking through Short Writing Assignments**
   Leader: John C. Bean, Seattle University
   Dates: Thursday and Friday, May 23, 24,1991

For more information and registration brochures, call 931-8731, local 1415.

Literacy in the Information Age, a project of the Canadian Home and School Federation, has published **Literacy Exchange, a model** to promote literacy among children and youth. It is available from the Quebec Home and School Association, 3285 Cavendish Blvd., Suite 562, Montreal H4B 2L9. Tel.: 514-481-5619.

The 1990 Fall Forum of The Coalition of Essential Schools
Sponsored by RE:LEARNING, an initiative in school reform
November 8 -10, 1990
St. Louis, MO

Une Société sans Barrières, Forum pour favoriser l'éxercise des droits des personnes analphabètes le 9,10,11 novembre,1990, à l'Université du Québec à Montréal

- À l'intention des intervenantes et intervenants qui travaillent directement auprès de la population, des gestionnaires, des gens en communication. À l'intention de toutes celles et de tous ceux qui veulent agir pour diminuer les obstacles sociaux que rencontrent les adultes qui ont des difficultés à lire, écrire et calculer.

Organisé par la CEQ, l'ICÉA, et RGPAQ.

Let's Talk : Literacy Students Meet Policy Makers
Perspectives on the response of literacy funding bodies to students' needs.

Partners in Literacy, a coalition of English-language literacy groups in Quebec, is sponsoring a panel discussion and question period moderated by **Jon Kalina,** host of C.B.C.'s Daybreak

Panelists •**Dick Nolan**, Director, National Literacy Secretariat, Secretary of State, Canada.
•A representative of the Quebec Ministry of Education, Adult Ed.
•Student panelists
Date: Thursday, October 25,1990
Time: 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. (light supper/wine/cheese)
Place: Dawson College, 3040 Sherbrooke Street W., Room 5B-16
Cost: $3.00
R.S.V.P.: Jean Randle, 489-5301

Workshop on NewsAble
The manual, **NewsAble: Adult Basic Literacy Experience,** is a teaching guide on how to use a community newspaper to build basic and functional reading and writing skills.
McGill University, Leacock Building, Room 232
October 26, 1990
Montreal, Quebec
No fee, but pre-registration required before September 14.
Call: Ann Gauvin at (418) 688-8733

14 CONFERENCES

The Literacy Conference
October 9 - 12, 1990
Edmonton Convention Centre
Edmonton, Canada

Literacy 2000
October 18 - 21, 1990
Douglas College
New Westminster, B.C.
Speakers: Elsa Auerbach, John Ryan, Alan Wells, Jennifer Horseman

Linking Home and School through the Workplace
Workshops for Trainers in Reading, Writing, Math
Work in America Institute, Inc.
October 16 - 19, 1990
Stouffer Westchester Hotel
White Plains, N.Y

Cegeps at the Turning Point
Intercegep Professional Development Day
Wednesday, November 7, 1990
Champlain Regional College
St. Lambert, Quebec

The National Testing Network in Writing 1990
Multiple Literacies: Strategies for a New Decade
November 9 - 11, 1990
New York City

National Council of Teachers of English
Annual Convention
November 16 - 21, 1990
Atlanta, Georgia

Teaching Composition to Undergraduates
Conference on College Composition and Communication
January 3 - 6, 1991
Clearwater Beach, Florida

Call for papers: deadline September 15, 1990
Second North American Conference
on Adult and Adolescent Literacy
March 21- 23, 1991
Banff, Alberta

College Composition and Communication
March 20 - 23, 1991
Boston, MA.

Language and Literacy
April 6 - 10, 1991
School of Education,
University of East Anglia
Norwich, England

Call for papers: deadline September 15, 1990
Springboards '91
"Voices in Partnership"
annual conference of
Canadian Council of Teachers of English
April 10, 11, 12, 1991
Palais de Congrès, Montreal

Call for papers: deadline October 15, 1990
Seventh Conference on Computers and Writing
May 24 - 26, 1991
Biloxi, Mississippi

Details of these conferences available at The Centre for Literacy, Tel.(514) 931-8731, ext. 1415.

Literacy Across the Curriculum is published five times during the academic year by The QAAL/Dawson College Centre for Literacy in the Schools and the Community.

Single subscription	$ 7.50
Multiple subscription (10)	$36.00
Multiple subscription (20)	$65.00

To subscribe, complete this form and mail it with your cheque to:

The Centre for Literacy
Dawson College
3040 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3Z 1A4

I enclose a cheque for: $ 7.50
$36.00
$65.00

Make cheques payable to The Centre for Literacy.
On multiple orders outside Montreal, please add $3.00 additional postage.

Name: ______________________________
Institution: ______________________________
Address: ______________________________
____

December 1990 Vol. 6 No. 4 / 5

Literacy across the curriculum

Language for Learning

Creating a New Public Idea of Literacy

The literacy community has not had an effective public voice until now because it is fragmented and does not represent powerful constituencies. If that is to change, competing segments of that community are going to have to achieve some common understanding and speak with clarity to create a new public idea of literacy. This was the analysis of Millbrey McLaughlin, a public policy specialist from Stanford University, who closed the MLA conference, "Responsibilities for Literacy," on September 14 in Pittsburgh.

Her session was a synthesis of three days of presentations and round-table exchanges on literacy in the schools, the community, and the workplace. During that time, Professor McLaughlin listened, observed, participated, and consulted to gain some understanding of participants' concerns. She understood that we felt a gap between our conceptions of literacy and those held by the public. [For corroboration of those perceptions, see boxes 1 & 2, p.2]. Parents seem to be calling for "real school" and business demanding "real training" against a static notion of "basic skills;" they see literacy as something fixed, while literacy practitioners understand the issue as complex, multifaceted, relative, and located in a larger social setting. Practitioners also worry about inappropriate assessment measuring the wrong things and driving learners away, and know that the problem is not amenable to a quick fix.

One constructive and challenging route for the literacy community to follow, according to Mclaughlin, is to create a new public idea that can guide action and debate to serve the needs of learners.

What is a "public idea?"
A "public idea," she explained, is "what everyone knows" – the norms, values, and expectations that guide public discussion. She compared it to Kuhn's paradigm of scientific revolutions.

The power of a public idea is that it mobilizes energy; assigns power, blame, authority; and integrates contraries. It brings a measure of coherence in public practice and keeps alternative formulations off the public agenda. But most important, if we do not define this"public idea," someone else will.

How to construct a public idea?
There are three steps in the process.

1. Diagnose what is already there.
   - What are the values, facts, and approaches that serve as the intellectual base of the current idea?

continued on next page

INSIDE

4 **To Ponder**
6 Literacy Learners
8 **In the Classroom**
Writing in Photography
11 Context in Learning to Write: Legal Writing
14 Family Literacy
16 Women and Literacy
18 Literacy 2000
19 **Announcements**
20 **Resources**
21 **Conferences**

The Centre for Literacy Montreal Quebec

BOX 1

U.S. Public Attitudes on Educating the Workforce
According to a 1990 survey conducted by Daniel Yankelovich for Project Literacy U.S.*, the American public holds some major misperceptions about the connection between education and the economy. These include:

- The majority does not see any negative consequences for themselves personally if millions of their fellow citizens neglect their education.

- There is a narrow and distorted image of who is affected. It is seen as a ghetto problem — a problem with the underclass.
- Most Americans perceive the problem almost exclusively in moral terms as distinct from the lack of skills training.

- Many believe technology in the workplace will take away jobs instead of creating them.

- There is a belief that social and remedial programs don't work.

Yankelovich concludes that "[Education] has to be given the same type of priority as our national security."

* reported in *PLUS Bulletin*, November 1990.

BOX 2

Canadian Attitudes Toward Literacy 1990
In August 1990, Decima Research conducted an attitudinal survey about literacy among 1300 Canadians aged 16 and older. Almost 70% of respondents consider literacy (defined as "ensuring that Canadians can read and write") to be as importamnt as the quality of the environment. Most believe it to be more important today than it was in the past. However, the majority also believes that most people who have literacy problems are responsible for their own situation, and they do not attribute the problems primarily to a failure of the institutions. On the contrary they see institutions as the main providers of the solution.

Michael Sullivan, Vice-President of Decima, concludes that there is public concern, but little sense of personal threat or of connection to economic issues. When asked whether "most people who cannot read and write have only themselves to blame," only 21% of respondents totally disagreed.

Of course, some critics would call into question the very wording of the last statement.

continued from previous page

- What are the political and bureaucratic contexts, and the nature and level of conflict betweenthem?

2. Respect what's there, keeping in mind that the context zone is a minefield.
3. Construct a new positive idea, stressing theoretical and empirical support.

No one attempting to create such a new idea can afford to be naive. We have to acknowledge the political tension between those who send policy down (policy-makers) and those who deal with it (practitioners) and the organizational tension between employers and workers. The policy-maker/employer demands for accountability, standardization, and uniformity cannot be ignored. In response, we have to examine what we do effectively in practice that can provide alternative ways of meeting the demands for accountability.

continued on next page

Literacy Across the Curriculum
3040 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H3Z 1A4

Editor : Linda Shohet
Layout : The Weekly Herald
Design Concept : Janice Bernath

The Centre for Literacy

continued from previous page

Toward a new public idea of literacy

Despite all the competing interests and divergent loyalties among literacy organizations, there are common ideas emerging – that learners' voices must be heard, that learners must be provided with a safe learning environment, that authentic instruction must allow time for feedback and reflection, that early assessment can be counterproductive, that context matters.

Communicating the idea

No new idea can gain ascendancy unless it is clearly communicated, and Professor McLaughlin concluded with a series of suggestions:

- Draw a map of your own policy space.
- Who are the policy makers? What do they read? What are their affiliations?
- Prepare issue briefs on promising practices.
- Staff seminars for policy makers. Join forums in which they participate.

- Sensitize the popular press.
- Establish connections with universities to undertake research and produce basic data.
- Publicize small victories.
- Make use of networks.
- Write newsletters.
- Speak to local groups.

It will only be through such thoughtful, coordinated efforts that literacy finds a permanent place on the public agenda of the 1990s.

One Idea of Literacy

In oppositon to the dominant idea of literacy as a set of "simple" skills that can be isolated and taught in a vacuum, at The Centre for Literacy, we have been working with a vision of literacy that has not been widely shared, but that seems to be gaining adherents.

It sees literacy as a complex set of abilities, determined in social and cultural contexts, that brings with it the potential for pleasure and a sense of personal and collective empowerment, but the carries no guarantees. There are highly literate countries that are not democracies and there have been early democracies that did not enjoy mass literacy.

One's literacy cannot be separated from one's being. And literacy cannot be singled out as the factor responsible for poverty, crime, or low national productivity. It is **part** of a complex of social factors and must be addressed as **part** of the solution to any one of these problems.

This vision accepts that individuals will only be as literate as they need to be to achieve their personal goals within their community. Since we operate in different communities at home, at work, and as citizens, we adapt to different literacy needs as required. Without coercion, no official body external to a community can enforce a new demand for greater literacy unless the individual can see some personal reason for meeting the demand. Even with coercion, an individual will do no more than meet the minimum requirement. This has been borne out in our school systems.

It has serious implications for economic planners who want to "train" more literate workers to increase national productivity and improve the country's ability to compete internationally. No individual wants to be seen as an economic cypher, and recent polls have indicated that, indeed, neither Canadians nor Americans can see any connection between literacy and the economy. This may reflect the fact that North American business has not yet adapted to the new organizational structures of the late twentieth century and therefore has not yet experienced the skills shortage that experts have been warning of for some time. It may well be shortsighted, but it is the reality.

Literacy in the twentieth century is seen as a human right because of the potential it carries with it for personal and communal fulfillment. But for that potential to be fulfilled, there have to be major changes in educational, political, and social practices that demonstrate to individuals that the quality of their lives can be improved through literacy. The connection between personal and collective goals must be made explicit. No one is going to undertake the long and difficult task of becoming more literate to meet someone else's goals.

L.S.

Comments welcome.

On Literacy in History

1

Sweden 18th century: literacy for religion

Let us take one particularly revealing snapshot from the history of literacy: Sweden. Sweden was the first country in the West to achieve near-universal literacy, having done so before the end of the eighteenth century. Women had equality with men in literacy (an equality that does not exist even now in most of the world.) By the tenets of the literacy myth, Sweden should have been an international example of modernization, social equality, economic development, and cognitive growth. In fact, however, it was not. Sweden's remarkable achievement took place in a land of widespread poverty, for the most part without formal institutional schooling, and it neither followed from nor stimulated economic development. Sweden achieved its impressive level of reading diffusion without writing, which did not become a part of popular literacy until the mid-nineteenth century. And, furthermore, the quality of the literacy was far behind its quantity. Graff reports that even in the nineteenth century, more than a hundred years after Sweden's achievement:

> according to reading and comprehension tests, good reading skills did not relate strongly to the ability to understand. Popular skills tested well in assessments of oral reading and in memorization. They were, however, much less useful when it came to comprehension....Even near-universal Swedish literacy was stratified...Not surprisingly, members of the high-ranking and wealthy families scored highest on reading tests...(p. 310)

How did Sweden manage the feat of universal literacy? The Swedish literacy campaign, one of the most successful in the Western world, was stimulated by the Reformation and Lutheran Protestantism. Teaching was done on a household basis (hence the emphasis on the literacy of women), supervised and reinforced by the parish church and clergy, with regular compulsory examinations:

> ...people were persuaded to learn to read by means of an actual campaign initiated for political and religious reasons....the social pressure was enormous. Everybody in the household and in the village gathered once a year to take part in examinations in reading and knowledge of the Bible. The adult who failed these examinations was excluded from both communion and marriage...(Egil Johansson, 1977, cited in Graff, P. 149)

James Paul Gee, "The Legacies of Literacy", *Harvard Educational Review*, vol 58, no 2.

2

Austro-Hungary 18th century: literacy for bureaucracy

It was Protestant Prussia, in its day the most advanced model of the nation-state, with the most efficient army and bureaucracy on the Continent, that first introduced universal compulsory education. In 1763, the "soldier king" Frederick II decreed at least four years of schooling for all the children of his realm. In promoting universal literacy, the absolutist admirer of the French *encyclopédistes* no doubt saw himself as putting into practice some of their most revolutionary ideas. But enlightenment translated in peremptory orders, enforced with Prussian discipline and efficiency, turned out to have far less to do with freedom of thought than with the need for a minimally literate citizenry, able to function in a post-feudal society. Essentially the same reasons of state led to the introduction of compulsory education in Austro-Hungary in 1774. The system, in fact, derived straight from the Prussian model; Maria Theresa had no compunction about stealing her archenemy's ideas and educational experts. But the two specific problems greatly complicated the situation in the empire.

The first was the still unresolved power struggle between Church and state, which in the Protestant lands to the north had been decisively settled some two centuries later. In the Habsburg monarchy, the conflict remained perpetually suspended in a volatile mixture of confrontation and accommodation.... Education, however, such as it was, had until the middle of the eighteenth century been the exclusive preserve of the Catholic Church; non-Catholic communities within the empire - Hungarian Calvinists, Lutheran Saxons - were obliged to maintain their own schools to the best of their limited financial abilities.

But practical considerations compelled drastic reforms, and Maria Theresa was nothing if not practical. Untouched by the spirit of the enlightenment encased in an armor of bigotry and prejudice, she nonetheless had no qualms about doing what, for the increasingly centralized bureaucracy of her autocratic government, had become imperative.

....

An ultimately far more disruptive issue had to do with the complex mix of nationalities that found themselves lumped together in the haphazard improvisation referred to as Austro-Hungary but that contained numerous minorities neither Austrian nor Hungarian, such as Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Ruthenes, Slovenes, Rumanians, and Poles. The main thrust of the 1774 General Education Act was, in fact the cultural homogenization of these diverse population, whose linguistic separatism posed growing political as well as administrative problems. Consequently, German was to be taught as a compulsory subject in all elementary schools, and mandated as the exclusive language of instruction at the secondary level and beyond. The ostensible rationale was utilitarian: since the state and its organs of government conducted all business in German, familiarity with the language was part of becoming a properly responsive and responsible subject. The practical effect of this policy would have amounted to forced Germanization of all ethnic minorities, but initially there seemed to be no alternative, the choices being mass education, albeit in German, and mass illiteracy, in what-ever language.

Ernst Pawel, *The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, 1984)19-21.

Let's Talk : Literacy Learners Meet the Policy Makers

A Panel Discussion
October 25, 1990

More than 200 people turned out for an evening that gave six literacy learners the opportunity to talk directly to federal and provincial policy makers about bureaucratic obstacles that have made learning a lifelong struggle for them. They were not statistics and they were not stereotypes. One of the six has a university degree, one has completed college, one is in college, two are in a school board literacy program, and one is working with a tutor. The policy makers were Richard Nolan, Director of the National Literacy Secretariat, Secretary of State, Canada, and Lino Mastrianni, Ministère de l'éducation, Adult Services, Literacy.

Their words are better than mine.

"After I graduated university, when I went for a job, I went in there and they gave me this wonderful ten-page—to me it seemed like an essay—application. They wanted me to write why I wanted the job. We usually take tricks with us, like could we take it home, and I asked, "Could I take it home?" Unfortunately they said no, and I walked out of there saying, "I could have had that job; I was qualified, but unfortunately, I could not express it in writing. And I decided I have to get help."

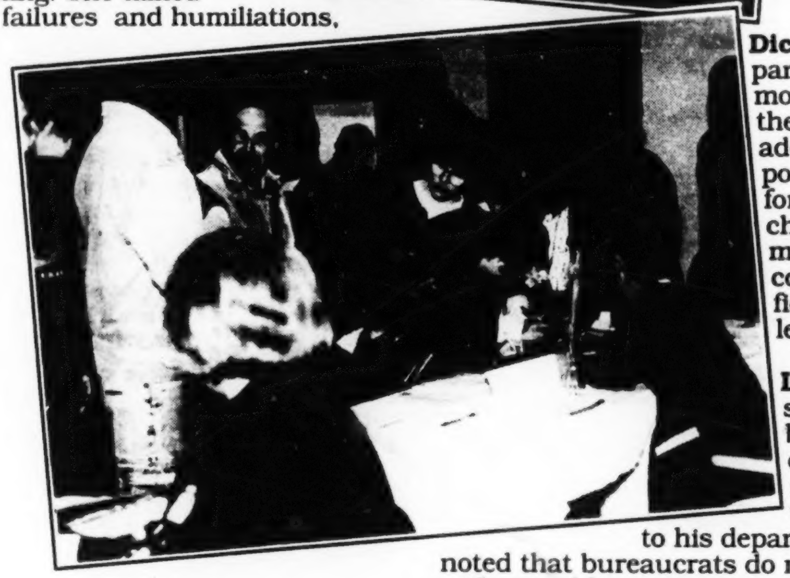
[**Desirée**, whose learning disability was not recognized all the way through university and who passed courses through immense willpower and brilliant coping strategies.She spoke against the provincial policy that blocks high school graduates from literacy classes regardless of their actual ability to read and write.]

FRASER-HICKSON LIBRARY

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

" The doctors said I was retarded and that I would never be able to function in society, and because I had a speech problem and a lazy eye, I had a very hard time in school. I stopped school in grade 5. I've never gone back until a woman I work with told me about the High School of Montreal and said it was a learning school to learn to read and write and I said, "Well, I might as well give it a try," and that's where I started. I started at 32."
[**Elsie**, a learner who worked effectively at a series of jobs until she became unemployed at age 43 and could not find another job without better reading and writing. She talked about her early failures and humiliations, and the self-esteem she has gained in her learning program.]

"I've had this problem since I can remember. I've tried to get help before and the services were just like they said. They just stick you in a class and "pouf" push you somewhere else, and you're in a Special Ed class. That was the system way back then, but now it's starting to change. But there's still people out there that need to be told that if you can't read, it's not a disease, it's a problem and it has to be corrected."
[**Barry**, a new learner working with a tutor since losing his job at a printing company. He talked about his desire to work and not remain on welfare.]



Dick Nolan counselled participants to work more effectively with the media and to address concerns to politicians who push for the kinds of changes required to meet the diverse and complex needs identified so clearly by the learners.

Lino Mastrianni said that he had not been aware of some of the concerns raised and promised to bring them back to his department; but he also noted that bureaucrats do not change policy withoutpublic pressure, and that politicians have to be made aware of issues on which the public wants action.

L.S.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Writing in Photography

The notion of a picture being "worth a thousand words" points up the power of a visual image to awaken a viewer's immediate response and gut understanding. Still, if a picture has meaning beyond the initial response elicited, it will engender endless interpretation, most of it expressed in words. Yet written communication has traditionally had little place in most formal photography programs.

Martin Coles, a teacher in the Dawson Institute of Photography, spent a semester working with eight teachers from other departments in a collaborative workshop on using writing to enhance learning their own discipline. During that time, he developed a series of writing assignments that shaped a course he was teaching on Portrait Photography.

The excerpts below include the assignments, Martin's reflections on them, and samples of student response.

L.S.

Assignment #1: Portraiture Journal
Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings about portraits and portraiture, your responses to portraits you've seen, sketches or descriptions of portraits you would like to take.

Each entry should be about one page long. Occasionally you may want to add a response on the facing page to an entry you wrote some time earlier.

A three-ring binder is ideal for a journal since you can readily remove entries you wish to keep private. In other works, you have the option of editing your entries and deleting some of them before handing in your journal at the end of term.

Assignment #2: Getting there
As photographers, where would you like to be in five years?
What do you see as the biggest obstacles to getting there?

Assignment #3: Letter to a friend
Imagine that you have a friend in Winnipeg who is interested in photography and who has just set up a small black-and-white darkroom. Your friend has written to ask you two questions:

"How can I tell when my negs have been properly exposed and processed?"

"What are the important things for me to remember if I want to make really good black-and-white prints?"

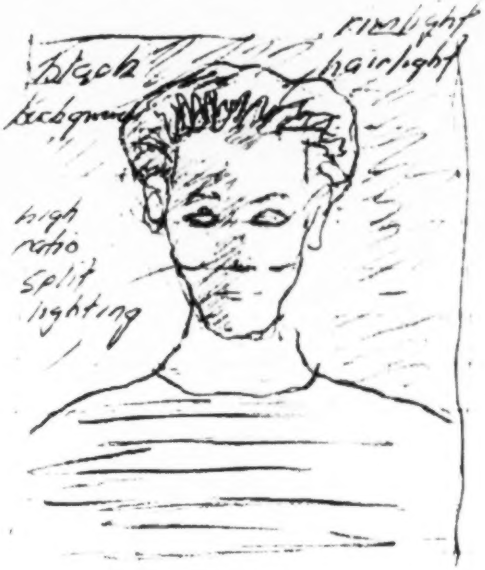
Please write a reply to your friend answering these questions.

Teacher's reflection:
One suggestion that worked well for me was the idea of asking students to write for their peers, not for a teacher who already knows all the answers. I set one group of students the task of responding to a friend in Winnipeg who had written asking two specific questions about photography. Most of the students really got into the spirit of the assignment, some even framing their letters around humorous situations or fictitious domestic issues.

Student Sample: A Portait Idea

Edwin Yee
4IM

Portrait Journal



A portrait idea.

I have a Jamaican friend that I would like to photograph in black-and-white using dramatic lighting

He has very structured facial features - high forehead, deep set eyes, strong cheekbones a prominent mouth, and a longish face - which are striking under normal lighting. but under dramatic lighting

I would like to use split lighting with a high ratio between main and fill, leaving half his face in almost complete shadow, to create a great sense of mystery and the feeling of a hidden aspect of his personality.

I would use a black background without any background light, so that he would be enveloped in darkness, so attention would focus entirely on the face. To create just a little bit of separation between subject and background, I would use a light to create a rim of light on his hair. This would also highlight the dreadlock hairstyle he has.

The portrait would be a tight head and shoulders shot, done in black and white to emphasize the character of his face and remove any elements of colour which might distract from his face.

I can visualize the portrait in my mind, and think it will work very successfully.

Teacher's reflection:

I was particularly pleased at the response of my students to the three assignments that involved writing. Up till now, I've never set writing assignments for my photography students. I'm sure that the act of putting their thoughts down on paper will help them take better pictures. I was especially pleased by the journal written by one of my portrait students. He wrote a number of very thoughtful entries on the problems of portraiture; for example, he laments the fact that portrait subjects are so hard to please – they find fault with photographs that everyone else sees as excellent likenesses.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

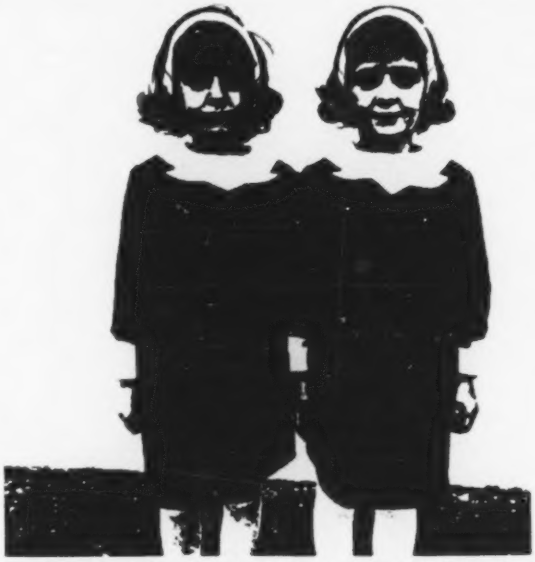
Student Sample: Thoughts on child photography

Somewhat of a stressful activity depending on who you're photographing. I found that I must always keep my subject (the child) at attention because childrens' moods shift and they are easily distracted from the camera. The photograher must build a genuine relationship, so as to keep an ongoing interest between the subject and himself.

Looking at the child portrait I took I am unsatisfied with one aspect of the image : the wetness around the girl's mouth due to overindulgence of her lolly-pop. Trying to find ways of entertaining her and communicating at her level was also a challenge.

Teacher's reflection:
Reading is conversation at a distance. This is a splendid way to sell the idea of reading to students who may view libraries as little better than morgues. Learning can be fun. Once you become passionately involved in one of the conversations taking place in a library, you have tapped into one of the greatest forces available to mankind.

Student sample: Response to an Arbus photograph



This photograph appeals to me because of its obvious symmetry. At the same time it captures these two ordinary girls -- turns them into freaks and then turns them into stars

Student Sample: Getting there

In five years time I would like to be on the coast of Nova Scotia in a house big enough to furnish a studio and a family. Ultimately, I would like to have my own business in Product and Editorial Photography with an office in Halifax (and a smaller studio) but do most of my work from my home. I think this is slightly unrealistic but it's fun to dream and if it does happen I imagine it will take longer than 5 years. I would say my biggest obstacle in achieving this would have to be money. I have no studio equipment and I will be paying installments on student loans for the next 7 years at least. Besides that there is self-confidence which often disappears when I need it most. Going to a city to scout clients when you don't know a soul requires some guts and a lot of forethought.
Like I said, it's a dream.

The Importance of Context in Learning to Write

Summary of a presentation by Aviva Freedman, Professor of Linguistics at Carleton University, given on November 12, 1990 at a meeting of the Academic Alliance of English Teachers of Quebec. Reported by Maureen Newman, Department of English, Champlain College, St. Lambert, Quebec.

Defining context
Aviva Freedman's discussion on context provided both a theoretical and a practical look at the teaching of writing. On the theoretical level she began with an overview of current research on writing by contrasting two leading theories, the cognitive and the social constructive.

Aviva pointed out how a definition of **context** for writers can be based on either of these theories. Moreover, teachers do not always use the same definition. She also pointed out that as teachers, we are not necessarily making a distinct choice of either one theory or the other. However, it is useful to be aware of the differences.

TWO CURRENT THEORIES OF WRITING

COGNITIVE	**SOCIAL CONSTRUCT**
• looks at writing as a knowing process • based in part on work of cognitive psychologists • looks at the individual writer • problem-solving models eg: Linda Flower	• social construction of meaning • looks at writer within cultural group • we make meaning as we interact. Meaning is not from without
• looks at individual in isolation • sets tasks such as "Ask a 17 year-old to write about abortion for *Seventeen* magazine."	• looks at discourse community • people operate in communities • asks questions: How is meaning made? how do you get into this community?
reductionist	holistic
general (universally true)	local (like an anthropologist, looking at a specific community)
focus on development	focus on experience
experimental/research	naturalistic/ethnographic
• draws from Vygotsky & ideas on concept formation	• draws from Vygotsky & ideas about individual - internalizing from social world, the very way in which we think is based on social interaction. - our selves are created by the social world we're in.
• deliberate choices at conscious level	- beyond conscious choices - degree to which we are being shaped by and for political/social/economic systems

Writing about law
On a more practical level, Aviva talked about a research project she conducted involving students who had to write about law cases. One of her jobs at Carleton is to

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

coordinate The Writing Centre where tutors help students from all disciplines with their writing assignments. One term the tutors spoke to her frequently about students who needed help writing law cases. This is a distinct type of writing - one that required different skills.

There are about 400 students taking this course at Carleton. These are not law students, although many aspire to become lawyers. All of them, from the experienced to the inexperienced writers, learned fairly quickly to write using legal "style". And this was not the impassioned prose of lawyers on TV. It was the complex, detailed, often dull writing of lawyers. (See sample in BOX 1) The students knew that this writing was different from other writing they did, but they could not say how they learned to do it. Aviva was intrigued: how did they learn?

She wondered if they had models of legal writing to imitate. She thoroughly analyzed the two assigned textbooks. She taped and analyzed the lectures and the seminars. She interviewed the teaching assistants at length. There were no models for the writing assignments. And the teacher, who tried hard, could not explain how the students had learned to write this way.

Continued on next page

BOX 1

Legal Writing
The following is a sample of writing by a first-year student:

The defence in this case would presumably argue that the wall is not a building by definition. Using eiusdem generis (of the same kind) canon of interpretation, it is evident that "building" as seen in section 4 refers to the list in section 3: a house, shed, barn or other structure, which implies structures that can be occupied. Therefore, the exclusion of members of the class, fence and wall, imply that they are not included under the meaning of "building". The elements listed under building all imply that one can occupy them. Since one cannot occupy a wall, (in the same sense that one cannot enter into it or take shelter in it), Brown's boundary marker is therefore not applicable for prosecution under this statute.

BOX 2

Changing Contexts of Legal Writing
On the day that this summary arrived, I received another article in the mail from a lawyer friend who knows of my own interest in disciplinary writing. This article, entitled "The Standard Form of Agreement Of Sale In Plain English," was published by Toronto lawyer Paul Perell in the *National Real Property Law Review*, Volume 3, Number 12, 1990. It argued that "Without any loss of meaning or of legal precision or effectiveness, it is possible to draft a relatively sophisticated standard form agreement of sale without legalese and in 'Plain English.'"

Before presenting a redraft of the standard form agreement used by the Toronto Real Estate Board, Mr. Perell engages in a detailed discussion of the complaints leveled against traditional legal writing. These include: "obsolete and pompous vocabulary, verbosity, redundancy, extremely and unnecessarily long and complicated sentences, too many ideas in one sentence, nominalization...., the use of weak verbs, the overuse of the passive tense, the overuse and unnecessary use of negative constructions, misplaced modifiers, and the illogical ordering of ideas."

It struck me that, with a growing public pressure in the U.K., U.S., and Canada for making legal documents readable, teachers of law are going to become more conscious about creating a new context for legal writing that initiates students into a changing discourse. *L.S.*

Continued from previous page

Teachers create context

Aviva did find that students learned some of the lexicon from lectures. Also some of the ways of reasoning like a lawyer were picked up **some** of the time from lectures and seminars. However, her main conclusion was that the teacher as expert creates the context of the discipline. [See BOX 2]. Teachers play a particular and very important role. They carve up the world, and present a chunk of it to the class. They create a knowledge base not only by what they say but also by what they represent. They are the experts. They are **initiating** the students into the study of law. They set up a **collaboration** with the students who thereby become members of this discourse community. (I am reminded here of Frank Smith describing the English teacher as the one who welcomes students into the Literacy Club.)

Aviva mentioned that she has a lot of difficulty with the idea of writing for a discipline when the expert in the discipline does not direct the task.

She left us with the question: how much do we need to teach students **about** writing?

Two books she recommended:
Arthur Appleby, *Contexts for Learning to Write* , 1984.
Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

To someone who can't read frustration is a way of life.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Family Literacy

by Dee Goforth

> *Children have rights. They have the right to literacy. They have the right to be assisted and guided in their learning.....The ability to learn language, spoken and written, rests with our children. Let us provide the conditions in our homes and in our classrooms to allow it to flourish and blossom. The responsibility is ours. The future is theirs.*
>
> David Doake, *Reading Begins at Birth* [1]

Literacy begins at home
Most experts now agree that literacy skills begin to develop in early childhood. Children learn to read by being immersed in experiences with books and print from as early on in their lives as possible. This concept called emergent literacy has important implications for both home and school. Those children who grow up in a literate, book-oriented environment begin school with well-formed literacy concepts.

Parents can help introduce their children to literacy by involving them in everyday activities with written language. They can encourage them to scribble, invent stories and draw pictures; write letters to friends or family; or help with something as simple as making a grocery list.

But many parents cannot afford books; many are too intimidated to walk into a library; many have difficulty choosing age-appropriate and quality books; many cannot find the time in their busy schedules to read to their children; many lack the confidence to talk to their children's teachers. And many cannot read at all. What about those parents who do not have the skills or confidence to read to their children or those who do not understand the importance of reading to children?

We know that in literate societies the most disempowered are those adults who cannot read. The effects of the illiteracy cycle on individuals and families are emotional and devastating.

Defining family literacy
For these reasons many practitioners and theorists who work in adult literacy now support an intergenerational approach, or family literacy. Despite the variety of programs that qualify as "family literacy," they all share a common goal "to foster a family atmosphere where literacy can flourish and the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy can be broken."[2]

Family literacy is a community-based initiative; implicit is a shared responsibility within the community to provide intergenerational education, support and advocacy. The intention is to empower the individual and establish reading as a valued activity shared within the family.

What counts as family literacy programming?
During 1989, I was a member of the Ontario Family Literacy Interest Group. In Sudbury, as co-ordinator of a community-based literacy program, I promoted family literacy by conducting workshops on topics such as reading tips for parents, explaining the whole language approach, learning to read through writing, or creating a literate home environment. I offered these to adult learners, tutors, literacy practitioners, daycare workers, and other interested members of the community.

Responding to the needs of their particular communities, other family literacy programs are helping parents assist teenagers with homework, providing daycare support while parents upgrade their literacy skills, or establishing school/community links. There are many programs operating across the country. [See BOXES 1 and 2].

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

Family literacy makes sense. If we as literacy practitioners are committed to achieving universal literacy; if we accept the idea that parents, as natural and willing partners, play a crucial role in the literacy development of their children; if we know that being able to read to a child is often an adult's primary motivation for joining a literacy program, then we have a major responsibility to reach out to these adults and their children. Parents who benefit from newly acquired literacy skills and who understand how children acquire literacy will pass on those skills and the value of reading to the next generation. Only then will the cycle of illiteracy be broken.

BOX 1

One model of a family literacy program

One successful model operating in both Kingston and Thunder Bay, Ontario, offers family reading sessions lasting six weeks to low-income families in local housing projects. Parents attend with their children once a week for two hours, during which they practice reading with their children and also discuss concerns about reading and parenting while their children have supervised play nearby. Other shared activities include singing, cooking, and crafts. Library and bookstore tours are an important part of the programs.

BOX 2

A research-outreach program: Parents-as-Partners-as-Learners

This joint project of The Quebec Eastern Townships School Board, Adult Education Services, and The St. Francis Literacy Council began in 1987 with a pilot-project and has recently been expanded with several objectives: to collect data on rural Quebec English-speaking families in which the parents are functionally illiterate; to train some adult learners as "Learner-animators;" to sensitize local primary school principals and teachers to the connections between adult and child literacy; and to reach some of the local families to encourage the parents to learn with and for their children. Since 1987 PAPAL has been implemented in eight elemenatry schools and reached 600 families.

***Dee Goforth** has worked on and coordinated many types of literacy programs and served in many Ontario organizations over the past ten years, including the Ontario Literacy Coalition. She has recently moved to Montreal where she is teaching at the Kanasatake Alternative School near Oka and tutoring in local programs.*

---

[1] David Doake, *Reading Begins at Birth*, Richmond Hill, Ont: Scholastic-Tab Publications, 1988.

[2] Adele Thomas, "Family Literacy in Canada," *Movement for Canadian Literacy*, Spring 1990:6. Ms.Thomas reviews a number of initiatives in family literacy. [See BOX 1] She also provides a preliminary bibliography.

An invitation to explore the issue and begin a conversation about

Women and Literacy

Marie-Francine Joron

> "What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to use, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives." (Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*)

Background

In what ways is literacy a woman's issue? If we limit ourselves only to numbers, literacy is almost exclusively a woman's issue. The International Task Force on Literacy estimates that 70% of today's illiterate people are women and girls. Rates of illiteracy for women are consistently higher than those of men whether they refer to women in industrialized, developing, or least developed countries. In Statistics Canada's Survey of Literacy Skills Used In Daily Activities (1990), of the 2% (320,000) of Canada's adult population identified as having no skills in either of the two official languages, the majority (3 out of 4) are women over the age of 35.

The Questions

Does the high rate of illiterate women make literacy a women's issue? Is literacy especially a women's issue? Is there a women's view of literacy? If indeed literacy is redefined as being a woman's issue, which women are we talking about? Are there different kinds of literacy? What are the barriers to full literacy? Is literacy linked to further domestication, to liberation, to poverty, to patriarchy, or to some other issue? What do women want to learn about? Which approaches work best with and for women? Do literacy workers make assumptions about the needs and lives of this female population? In recent years much research has been undertaken to examine these issues.

Some of these questions are being addressed in articles, reviews and books not to mention in classes and in conferences: literacy is seen as being inextricably entwined with questions of justice, of oppression, of empowerment, of gender, of women's development and learning styles; of inequality of opportunities, and of accessibility and powerlessness. In industrialized countries, the acquisition of literacy might mean empowerment at a personal level while in developing countries it might denote a collective undertaking.

Literacy is not static; it is always in the process of becoming, and a great part of being literate is not just acquiring basic reading, writing and numeracy skills, but acquiring the ability to decode context, to ascribe particular meanings to certain settings.

Some readings

When I set out to become better acquainted with some of these complex issues I compiled a reading list. No doubt an eclectic and incomplete one at best, certainly not exhaustive, but stimulating and challenging for anyone interested

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

in pursuing the matter further. To get an overview, I suggest that you first read the excellent number of *Canadian Woman Studies* devoted entirely to women and literacy. Some references which enlarge the context, such as Gilligan, Belenky et al, Heilbrun and Woolf, I urge all readers to include in their personal collection.

I am also inviting readers to respond with comments or with suggestions for a more profound reading on the matter. The majority of the works listed here can be consulted at The Centre.

As a postscript to the Literacy 2000 conference that took place October 18-21 in Vancouver, a group of women has decided to form a network concerned with women and literacy. It will work through the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW). Should you be interested in joining, please contact me at The Centre.

Marie-Francine Joron is Associate Director of the Centre for Literacy.
(514) 931-8731

Suggested Reading

Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.R., & Tarule, J.M. (1986). *Women's Ways of Knowing, the Development of Self, Voice, and Mind.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (1989). *Let's Talk About Women & Literacy.* Toronto: CCLOW.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice, Psychological Theory and Women's Development.* Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press.

Heilbrun, C. (1979). *Reinventing Womanhood.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Heilbrun, C. (1988). *Writing a Woman's Life.* New York: Ballantine.

Horsman, J. (1990). *Something in My Mind Besides the Everyday: Women and Literacy.* Toronto: Women's Press.

Junge, B. J., & Tegegne, D. (1985). The Effects of Liberation from Illiteracy on the Lives of 31 Women: A Case Study. *Journal of Reading,* 28, 606-613.

Kazemek, F. (1988). "Women and adult literacy: Considering the other half of the house." *Lifelong Learning: An omnibus of practice and research,* 11(4), 22-25.

Parajuli, P., and Enslin, E. (1990). "From Learning Literacy to Regenerating Women's Space: A Story of Women's Empowerment in Nepal." *Convergence,* 23(1), 44-55.

Ramdas, L. (1985). "Illiteracy, Women and Development: Questions and reflections." *Adult Education and Development,* 24, 95-105.

Ramdas, L. (1987). "Literacy and Empowerment: A Definition for Literacy." *Convergence,* 20(3 & 4), 54-57.

Ramdas, L. (1990). "Women and Literacy: A Quest for Justice." *Convergence,* 23(1), 27-41.

Rockhill, K. (1987). "Gender, Language and the Politics of Literacy." *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 8(2), 153-167.

The Literacy Issue: Feminist Perspectives on Reading & Writing. (1990). *Voices Rising,* 4(1).

Women and Literacy. (1988). *Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme,* 9(3 & 4).

Woolf, Virginia. (1928). *A Room of One's Own.* London: Grafton Books.

Woolf, Virginia. (1938). *Three Guineas.* London: The Hogarth Press.

Literacy 2000: Make the next ten years matter

Douglas College, New Westminster, B.C.

October 18-21, 1990

This conference gathered practitioners, researchers, program coordinators, administrators and learners from Canada, the U.S.A. and Britain for three and half days filled with wonderful learning opportunities. In addition to the workshops and plenary sessions were lunches where participants were encouraged to eat and talk with presenters.

Some highlights

John Ryan, coordinator of Unesco's International Literacy Year Secretariat, was the keynote speaker. In his address entitled "What is literacy?" Mr. Ryan challenged us to redefine literacy as society evolves and not to forget that literacy is just as much a human right as basic education is.

Fernando Cardenal, the closing speaker, presented a film on the Literacy Brigades made while he was Sandinista Minister of Education in Nicaragua responsible for the very successful Literacy Crusade. The Sandinista Government, just after taking power in 1979, undertook one of the world's most extensive literacy crusades ever which in a matter of months reduced the rate of illiteracy in Nicaragua from 50.2 to 12.9%.

Francis Kazemek, researcher and author from Eastern Washington State University, was a panelist and also lead a workshop on understanding literacy as a developmental process. He suggested that we continue to examine all the definitions of literacy and challenge those programs that continue to circumscribe people into stereotypes rather than inciting them to develop their personal, imaginative, social and economic powers.

Jenny Horsman, a feminist adult educator and literacy practitioner working out of Toronto and Nova Scotia, led a workshop on women's experience of il/literacy. She drew on research data obtained from interviews with women learners in rural Nova Scotia. Workshop participants, all women except for three men, explored their reactions to learning experiences where they were treated as being dumb. We reflected also on those tangible and intangible forces that hindered and helped them in their learning and in their pursuit of education. These included low self-esteem as well as family and time constraints as lived by women in their everyday lives.

Pat Rigg, a consultant from Tuscon Arizona, held a session on "Closing gaps between research and practice." Dr. Rigg argues that practitioners often deal with authentic research questions daily but are loathe to write up their findings for academic journals. In fact, in order to close the gap between good practice and research, practitioners must disseminate their findings by addressing their colleagues in journals and other publications targetting practitioners' concerns rather than those of academics. Dr Rigg indicated what appeared to her as four areas to be researched; composition; learners writing and telling their own stories; gender, more specifically women, "considering the other half of the house;" first language literacy and participatory curriculum or knowledge as socially constructed.

Creature comforts delight

Participants' creature comforts were extremely well tended to. It was a smoke-free environmentally friendly conference. Paper recycling boxes were placed in meeting rooms for both white and coloured paper, no styrofoam cups. Participants supported a literacy project by buying a "Literacy is a Human Right" eco mug! Bottles got recycled, lunches came in brown paper bags decorated by elementary school children. Plastic name-tag holders were left at the end of conference to be reused.

M.-F. J.

Literacy Across the Curriculum Winter/Spring 1991 Workshops

All workshops take place at Dawson College, 3040 Sherbrooke Street W., from 9:00 - 4:00.

1.Organizing a Collaborative Classroom: A Workshop
Leader: Jim Reither, St. Thomas University, Fredericton, N.B.
Date: Friday, February 8,

2.Scientific Writing
Leader: Charles Bazerman, Georgia Institute of Technolgy
Date: Friday, March 8,

3.Teaching Critical Thinking through Short Writing Assignments and Small Group Tasks that Defy Plagiarism
Leader: John C. Bean, Seattle University
Dates: Thursday and Friday, May 23, 24

For information and registration brochures, call 931-8731, local 1415.

Literacy in the Information Age, a project of the Canadian Home and School Federation, has published **Literacy Exchange,** a model to promote literacy among children and youth. It is available from the Quebec Home and School Association, 3285 Cavendish Blvd., Suite 562, Montreal H4B 2L9. Tel.: 514-481-5619.

National Electronic Town Hall Meeting on Literacy, March 2, 1991 sponsored by The United Nations Association in Canada (UNAC)

A videoconference open to international community groups. The learner-directed forum will provide an opportunity to share concerns and compare local strategies for the 1990s. For information on how to participate, contact: Gabriella Sharrard, at (416) 265-5867 or write her at Medea Satellite Communications, 221 Keelesdale Avenue, Torontó, Ontario, M6M 4L5.

New Association for Media Education formed in Quebec

An Association for Media Education in Quebec (AMEQ) was formed in 1990 and meets monthly for discussions and speakers. Membership is open to anyone interested in media education. For information, call David Michel at 481-0708, Alison Tett at 954-9664, or Judy Brandeis at 484-9327.

The next AMEQ meeting should be of special inteerest to Media and English teachers:

SPEAKER: Gayle Goodman, MEQ,
TOPIC: Proposed new MEQ guidelines for media education in the English Language Arts Curriculum
DATE: Thursday, January 24, 1991, at 7:30 p.m.
PLACE: The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal 6000 Fielding

Quebec Workshops National Adult Literacy Database

English Workshop, February 13, Dawson College
French Workshop, February 14, Place t.b.a.

This training session will introduce potential users to the ease of accessing information about literacy programs and events across Canada. The database which has been funded by The National Literacy Secretariat is a joint project of The Association of Canadian Community Colleges and Fanshawe College in London, Ontario. It now has several thousand listings including schools, colleges, workplace, and community-based groups.

How can it be used? If you are beginning a new literacy program for former inmates, for example, and want to know who else in Canada is offering similar programs, you can call up the information from the database and receive a printout of institutions/organizations and contact people. It is an effective form of networking to avoid constantly reinventing the wheel. There is also a bulletin board with upcoming literacy events and lists of resources.

To register or for information, call Catherine Duncan, The Centre for Literacy, (514) 931-8731.

CORRECTION:
In the September 1990 issue, there was a typographical error on page 8, Table 2. **Level 1** should read "5%," not "55%."

The resources in The Centre for Literacy have now been catalogued and may be borrowed through inter-library loan at your institution or by calling The Centre at 514-931-8731. Documents can be consulted in the Centre from Monday - Friday, 9:00 - 4:00. If you cannot get in during those hours, special arrangements can be made to leave documents at the Reference desk in the Dawson College Library, 3040 Sherbrooke Street West, 5th floor. Copies of the entire catalogue may be requested for $6.00 or printouts on specific subject headings can be ordered at cost. For information, please call Catherine Duncan at the number above, local 1415.

The selection below is a sample of materials available on family/intergenerational and women's issues highlighted in this volume.

Intergenerational/ Family:

American Library Association. *Fact Sheet: Family Literacy.* Chicago, IL: ALA.

American Reading Council Programs: An Intergenerational Approach. New York, New York: American Reading Council.

Askov, Eunice N. (1987). *Penn State Adult Literacy Courseware: Impact on Parents and Children - Final Report.* University Park, PA: Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Penn State University.

Center for Early Adolescence. (1984). *General Reading on Early Adolescence.* Carrboro, NC: Center for Early Adolescence, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Comer, James P. (1986). "Parents Participation in Schools." *Phi Delta Kappan* (February): 442-446.

Comer, James P. (1989). "Help for No-Hope Kids." *Newsweek* (October): 50.

Dinnerstein, Elly., Jeanette Kroese Thomson. (1989). *The Learning-Teaching Parent.* Iles Laval, Quebec: Origins Publishing.

Family Literacy: A Bibliography. Baker & Taylor(1989).

Fear, Marion. (1990). *Parents as Partners as Learners.* Quebec: Eastern Townships School Board.

Hayes, Andrew E. (1989). *William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust Family Literacy Project: Final Report.* Wilmington, NC: University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

Home and School Institute, Inc. (1989) Washington, DC: Home and School Institute.

Jackson, Angela., Peter Hannon. (1981). *The Belfield Reading Project.* Rochdale, London: Belfield Community Council.

Intergenerational Literacy Model Project Handbook. (1987). El Paso: El Paso Community College.

McIvor, M. Conlon. (1990). *Family Literacy in Action: A Survey of Successful Programs.* Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press.

Nash, Andrea., Auerbach, Elsa. (1987). *English Family Literacy: An Annotated Bibliography.* Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts.

National Center for Family Literacy. (1989). *A Place to Start: The Kenan Trust Family Literacy Project.* Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy.

National Center for Family Literacy. (1990). *New From the National Center for Family Literacy.* (Spring). Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy.

Nickse, Ruth S. (1989). *Selected Bibliography: Family and Intergenerational Literacy.*

Popp, Robert (1990). *A Guide to Funding Sources for Family Literacy* Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy

Rich, Dorothy. (1988). *Megaskills: How Families Can Help Children Succeed in School and Beyond.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Shuttleworth, Dale. *Parents as Partners: Improving Literacy Skills Through Community Education.*

Sticht, Thomas G. and Barbara A. MacDonald (1989). *Making the Nation Smarter.* University Park, PA: Penn State University.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

Women:
(also see the list at the end of the article on women and literacy, p. 16)

Beck, Judy A. (1988). *Wider Opportunities: Combining Literacy and Employment Training for Women: A Program Model.* Washington, DC: Wider Opportunities for Women.

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. (1989). *New Chance - A New Initiative for Adolescent Mothers and Their Children: Project Overview* . New York, NY: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. (1988). *The Challenge of Serving Teenage Mothers.* New York, NY: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education. (1988). *Women, Illiteracy and Poverty: Breaking the Cycle.* Washington, DC: National Coalition for Women and Girls.

Plotsky, Frances., Susan Ohm. *A Follow-Up Study of Returning Students - A Concentration on Women.* Alexandria, VA: ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 171 976.

Wismer, Susan. (1988). *Women's Education and Training in Canada.* Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women.

York University. (1988). *Canadian Women Studies*, vol. 9 no. 3, 4. Ontario: York University.

CONFERENCES

ESL in the CEGEP
New Approaches to Second Language Learning
Friday, January 18,1991
Cégep de Saint-Jérôme
Saint-Jérôme, Quebec

Reading '91: Language and Learning
February 20 -22, 1991
Centre for Continuing Education
York University
Downsview, Ontario

"Building Partnerships"
Learning Disabilities Association of Quebec
March 14 -15,1991
Sheraton Centre
Montreal, Quebec

"Education and Literacy: Learning at all Stages"
Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
March 21 & 22,1991
Inn on the Park
Toronto, Ontario

Conference on College Composition and Communications
March 21-23,1991
Boston, MA

"Launching the Literacy Decade: Awareness into Action"
Second North American Conference on Adult and Adolescent Literacy
March 21- 23, 1990
Banff Springs Hotel
Banff, Alberta

Language and Literacy
April 6 - 10, 1991
School of Education,
University of East Anglia
Norwich, England

Call for Papers
Deadline: January 28,1991
"Program Design and Delivery: Meeting the Needs of the Learner"
1991 Conference and Annual General Meeting
The Adult Basic Education Association of B.C.
April 10,11,12,& 13, 1991
Northwest Community College
Prince Rupert, B.C.

Springboards '91
"Voices in Partnerships"
Annual conference of
Canadian Council of Teachers of English
April 10,11,12,1991
Palais de Congrès
Montreal, Quebec

"Schooling and Other Cultures"
Inkshed 8
April 12 -14,1991
Montreal, Quebec

La table régionale d'alphabétisation 0613
le 18 avril 1991

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

le Méridien

"Empowerment through Reading"
International Reading Association
36th Annual Convention
May 6 -10, 1991
Las Vegas, Nevada

"Making a Difference"
1991 Canadian Association for Adult Education
May 8-11, 1991
Fredericton, N.B.

Seventh Conference on Computers and Writing
May 24 -26, 1991
The Biloxi Hotel
Biloxi, Mississippi

"Talking Together"
1991 International Conference to Explore the Role of Talk in Learning
May 23 - 25, 1991
Marriott Hotel, Toronto Airport
Toronto Ontario

1991 Laubach Literacy of Canada
National Conference
May 23 - 26, 1991
Charlottetown, P.E.I.

VISION "91
Annual Conference
Association of Canadian Community Colleges
May 25 -28,1991
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Call for Papers
Deadline: April 2,1991
Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition
July 10 -13, 1991
State College, PA

Summer Institute for Teachers
Teaching: A Learning Experience
July 9 -25, 1991
Mount Saint Vincent University
Halifax, Nove Scotia

Literacy: A Summer Institute
June 25 - July 11,1991
Dawson College
Montreal, Quebec

Call for Papers
American Association for Adult Education
International Conference
October 16 -20, 1991
Montreal, Quebec

Call for Papers
Participatory Education in the 21st Century: Dimensions of Literacy in a Multicultural Society
October 1992
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec
For information, call Riva Heft (514) 848-2015
or Olivia Rovinescu (514) 848-4955.

Details of these conferences available at
The Centre for Literacy,
Tel. (514) 931-8731, ext. 1415.

Literacy Across the Curriculum is published five times during the academic year by The Centre for Literacy.

Beginning with Volume 7 in 1991:

Single subscription	$ 9.00
Multiple subscription (10)	$50.00
Multiple subscription (20)	$85.00

To subscribe, complete this form and mail it with your cheque to:

The Centre for Literacy
3040 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H3Z 1A4

I enclose a cheque for: $ 9.00
$50.00
$85.00

Make cheques payable to The Centre for Literacy.
On multiple orders outside Montreal, please add $3.00 additional postage.

Name: ______________________

Institution: ______________________

Address: ______________________

____

Tel: ______________ FAX: ______________